SANDWELL
CHRONICLE

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Some festive cheer for devastated family
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Path slabs could be replaced to cut risk

SLABS used to pave footpaths across Sandwell could be torn up and replaced by tarmacadam to cut repair costs and minimise the risk of accident claims.

Sandwell Council is studying the feasibility of introducing the change across the borough after concerns over maintenance procedures were made by councillors.

Members said slabs became worn and damaged quickly with some lifting up making the paths uneven and creating an increased risk of tripping pedestrians.

They said the situation opened up the risk of claims being made against the authority alongside regular maintenance costs for repair and replacement of the slabs.

Wednesbury councillor Geoffrey Lewis said the issue had first been raised by the town's scrutiny panel but was an issue which affected the whole borough.

He said the suggestion had been put forward to replace footpath slabs across the entire area with tarmacadam to solve the issues.

"We had a situation in Wednesbury where slabs along a footpath were removed and tarmacadam laid in its place," he said.

"It seemed to solve all of the issues which first prompted the idea of looking at this across the entire borough."

Drop seen in metal theft

METAL thefts from council properties in Sandwell are down 65 per cent in the past year compared to the same period the previous year.

Meanwhile, burglaries, robberies and thefts from empty properties have also seen sharp drops. Sandwell Homes, which manages the borough's 29,000 council properties, and borough police, has won a national award in recognition of their fight against crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

They won the Social Landlords and Crime and Nuisance Group's annual Team of the Year category

Council will axe jobs in social care as cuts bite

SANDWELL Council has had to slash its budget by an extra £9 million compared to last year due to ongoing government cuts. Over the next three years, the budget will reduce by a total of £28m.

The full extent of the impact was revealed in the authority's latest financial report. The total funding it received from the Government in 2012/2013 was £240.447m, whereas the 2013/2014 financial year will see it drop to £231.596m.

The council has started to set out its budgets for the next three years.

The adult social care budget will shrink from £93.3m in 2013 to £83.1m in 2015, the children's budget is expected to drop from £68.2m in 2013 to £57.7m in 2015 and the homes and communities funds will drop from £6.2m to £5.2m in 2015.

Jobs at all levels will go and services stripped with the restructing of the adult social care department. Exactly what is going or how many posts will be lost will not be revealed until the cuts are confirmed tomorrow (Fri).

Social care chief Councillor Ann Jaron said: "We are facing massive cuts and we are having to restructure to take these cuts. We can no longer just reduce our spending by making small changes anymore, we are having to make a big change to meet this huge reduction in our budget.

"What we have to make sure is that these cuts don't just result in an OK service, we still want to be providing a good service to the most vulnerable people in our community. These changes mean we are going to have to rely more on the voluntary sector and people's goodwill.

"We of course need to still help those who are most at need, but what it does mean is that some of those services which help people who don't need quite as much help may need to go."

RAID JEWELLER'S GOLDEN SUPPORT

by Lee Watton

A JEWELLER has thanked the community for its overwhelming support after he was hit over the head with a sledgehammer when he confronted masked robbers who smashed their way into his Smethwick shop.

Men wearing balaclavas battered their way through the front security door at Davand Jewellery, in Bearwood Road, using a sledgehammer .

Glass counters were smashed and 17 trays of gold jewellery, worth tens of thousands of pounds, was taken in the raid at the beginning of December.

Store owner David Nicholls said residents and businesses from the community had been "absolutely golden" in the aftermath of the robbery.

He and his wife, Linda, received 40 bunches of flowers in the days following the raid from concerned residents.

Customers also dropped in to see the couple with boxes of chocolates and also purchased items to help the couple get back on their feet following the raid.

Business leaders from the town have also visited the shop to offer their support over the festive period.

A new security door and reinforced counters have now been installed at the store costing thousands of pounds to put in place.

Mr Nicholls, who was hit on the head with the sledgehammer when he confronted the robbers, said he and his wife had been "blown away" by the support received.

"One lady gave us an envelope which we thought contained a Christmas card," he said.

"She left the shop quite quickly and when we opened the envelope later there was £50 inside."

"I tried to track her down as we could not accept such a gift but was unable to. We plan to give the money to charity. This just shows the level of support we have received from both residents and businesses in the community.

Jeweller David Nicholls in his shop after masked raiders stripped the cabinets

"We have always lived by the motto that some good comes from every situation and that has certainly been the case here.

"People have been coming in and asking us how we are doing. It has been wonderful," he said.

No arrests have been made over the raid.

Karl's marathon challenge over

Karl Hinett shows off his medal after completing his 100th marathon in two years

A HERO soldier who was badly burned during a rescue mission while serving in Iraq has completed a fundraising challenge to run 100 marathons in two years.

Karl Hinett, from Tipton, celebrated as he crossed the finish line of his final 26-mile run, which took place in Liverpool.

His challenge started in Switzerland on New Year's Day 2010 and has raised thousands of pounds for Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital where he was treated.

The 24-year-old suffered severe burns to his hands, legs, arms and face when an armoured vehicle in which he was travelling was bombed in 2005. He had been in Iraq for five months when the attack happened. His regiment had been taking part in a rescue operation to free two British soldiers captured and held in Basra. His burns were so bad he had to learn to walk again.

Karl said completing the challenge, on New Year's Eve, felt like the "end of an era". He said on his Facebook page: "The past two years have been painful and long, but it was all worth it for the QEHB Charity."

His efforts have raised more than £13,000 for the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham Charity. He has run marathons across 26 countries as part of the challenge, including one through the Amazon Jungle.

Humbled Kim tells of tears at honour

Kim Douglas – BEM

A SANDWELL woman has been awarded the British Empire Medal for services to people with asthma in the Queen's New Year Honours list.

Kim Douglas, aged 50, from Great Barr, set up the George Coller Memorial Fund charity after her son George Coller died from asthma at three-and-a-half.

It was set up in 1999 and launched in 2000.

The aim of the charity is to raise awareness about asthma and to improve healthcare for children suffering with the condition.

Miss Douglas, who is mother to Hollie, 26, son Henry, 15 and grandmother to 16-month-old Dylan, said: "I think it is a huge honour, a tribute to anyone that has ever supported us.

"I am very humbled about it, on a personal level when I got the letter and it said George Coller, services to asthma, it made me cry – he didn't get the opportunity to achieve anything in his little life, but he has now."

Probe into town smell

A FOUL smell is plaguing streets around Wednesbury, sparking complaints from residents.

Sandwell Council environmental health officers are carrying out tests around the town centre to pinpoint the source so action can be taken but have so far been unsuccessful in determining the cause.

The smell was first reported around the Darby Road area but had since spread to other streets in the area and was steadily growing worse.

An update is expected early in the New Year.

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What's happening in your area? We are always keen to hear about any issues affecting you. Email your information and pictures to *wolvchron@expressandstar.co.uk*

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Bronze Kristian vaults his way to duchess duties

Kristian with the Duchess of Cambridge during the men's pommel horse final

KRISTIAN Thomas was Wolverhampton's biggest success story at the Olympics after his stunning bronze medal win.

The Wednesfield gymnast was part of the Team GB squad who claimed the first men's team gymnastic medal in 100 years at London 2012. His final high bar and floor routine at the North Greenwich Arena secured bronze for the team – after they were briefly elevated to silver in an afternoon of drama.

Only Japan's successful appeal, which left them in second place, denied Team GB an even better result – but Thomas, who trains at the Earls Gymnastics Club, Halesowen, admits he couldn't believe his success.

"I keep looking down at the medal and I'm amazed," said the 23-year-old.

"There was a lot of pressure on that routine. I was very confident I could go through it successfully.

"We've put in all the hard work and it was a matter of controlling the nerves and letting the body take over."

He finished seventh in the all-round event and eighth in the vault final as the Team GB gymnasts collected the team bronze. And Thomas believes British Gymnastics, which is based at Lilleshall, is about to explode after their achievements.

"It's been pretty surreal," said Kristian, who found himself sitting next the the Duchess of Cambridge discussing the finer points of the pommel event.

"The aim from British Gymnastics was to come away with one medal but to get a team medal and three other individual medals has been fantastic. Let's hope it's a new era."

Our golden girl

Ellie Simmonds' smile sums up the success of London 2012. The **Chronicle** looks back at our local athletes' triumphs and despairs

AT just 13, Ellie Simmonds had already etched her legacy into the Paralympics.

Now, after London 2012 she is the nation's sweetheart. So much so that she was one of the 12 athletes nominated for the BBC's Sports Personality of the Year.

The expectation and pressure heaped on the Walsall swimming sensation after her gold rush four years ago was immense.

Boldmere Swimming Club star Simmonds was one of the faces of the London Paralympic Games at the age of 17 as the nation waited for her to deliver the golds they, and she, craved.

And she did it in style with two golds, plus a silver and a bronze to justify her billing as one of the greatest Paralympic swimmers of the modern era.

She smashed her own world record by five seconds in the 400m – clocking 5:19.17s – and her Games-long battle with American teenager Victoria Arlen was one of the stories of the Paralympics.

Simmonds has dominated since winning double gold in Beijing, taking 15 consecutive major championship titles, including 10 world golds, in the last three years.

But she admitted, especially in the 400m, to feeling the heat from the home crowd.

"I felt like I had a lot of pressure on me," said Simmonds, who won 100m and 400m freestyle S6 in Beijing in 2008. It means so much to win a gold at your home Paralympics and the pressure was quite hard to deal with.

"The crowd were amazing, they got me to that wall first. People expected me to get gold, which was not the case with Victoria on the scene.

"It was a five-second personal best and I knew it would be so tough leading into it with Victoria being in such good form.

"The last 50m hurt, it just killed me, and I was so pleased to touch, I knew I had no regrets and I am so pleased. I knew my race plan and it was to stick with Victoria for the first 200m and then kick my legs for the last 200m and just go for it. The last 50m I literally gave it everything; when I touched, I had no energy left. It was a tough race, one of the toughest races of my life."

Simmonds' biggest concern pre-Games was that she would cry again in her post-race interviews, the teenager admitting she still can't watch her Beijing performances because her emotions embarrass her.

It was one target she didn't achieve as the waterworks flowed after her victories – and her bronze in the 50m.

It was her fourth strongest event and Simmonds was ranked fourth going into the final but produced a fine swim to claim third. Outsiders may think that a failure, but Simmonds admitted her shock at even making the podium.

"That was a massive surprise. This is my fourth event and I was going into the final fourth so I didn't expect that," she said.

"I was hoping to go for a personal best and see what happened and so to get a bronze, I will definitely take that."

Ellie Simmonds receives one of her gold medals at the Paralympics and, inset, at the BBC's Sports Personality of Year award ceremony

Tears then cheers for Jordanne

IT was a case of tears to cheers for Halesowen's Jordanne Whiley after she bounced back from semi-final heartbreak to claim wheelchair tennis doubles bronze at the Paralympic Games.

Whiley and partner Lucy Shuker were left inconsolable after seeing their gold medal dreams ended by Dutch pair Aniek van Koot and Jiske Griffioen.

After picking themselves up Whiley and Shuker sought the consolation of a bronze medal against a pair from Thailand. Despite losing the first set and slipping to a 3-0 deficit and match point in the second, they battled back to win.

Whiley said afterwards: "It was such hard work and it's such a relief."

I'll be back, says Varnish

JESS Varnish vowed to battle back from her Olympic heartbreak as she sets her sights on Rio. The 21-year-old from Bromsgrove suffered a nightmare after sheand team sprint partner Victoria Pendleton were demoted from the final.

They were guaranteed silver but disqualified after Pendleton passed Varnish, a member of Halesowen Cycling Club, too early on the final lap. But Varnish insisted her Velodrome frustration on her Olympic debut will not break her. "It makes me feel sick thinking about it but I'm going to get over it," she said.

Great Scott!

HALESOWEN'S Helen Scott has committed her future to racing for Paralympic gold with Aileen McGlynn in Rio. Scott, the sighted pilot to tandem rider McGlynn, claimed bronze in the tandem pursuit after winning silver with McGlynn in the 1km time trial and wants to complete the set in four years.

Bulldog Pollock

NO-ONE epitomises the British bulldog spirit more than wheelchair basketball player Jon Pollock but, as he battled through the pain barrier, the USA added insult to injury by denying Great Britain a third consecutive Paralympic bronze. The 35-year-old Wolverhampton Rhinos star was forced to undergo a pain-killing injection in his arm for Great Britain's last six matches but despite his tenacity, he ended his fourth Paralympic Games empty-handed.

Clarke challenge

DARREN Harris has been challenged to lead Great Britain's five-a-side football team to the medal mix-up at Rio 2016 by retiring legend Dave Clarke after the host nation finished their London 2012 campaign on a high. At 39 and with more than 100 caps to his name, the Wolverhampton ace is among the senior members of the Great Britain team which ended London 2012 with a first win of the competition to finish in seventh place compared to coming fifth at Beijing 2008.

Time for studies

JAMES FAIR has dismissed thoughts on Rio 2016 – and admitted he will concentrate on his studies first. The hockey goalkeeper from Cannock has started teacher training after Team GB's disappointing Olympics. They suffered a nightmare semi-final losing 9-2 to Holland and were beaten by Australia in the bronze medal match. It was a crushing blow for a squad with realistic hopes of gold and Fair admits he has some thinking to do.

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Buggies on cards to tackle dog mess

SPECIAL quad bike machines to tackle dog mess could be introduced to the streets of Sandwell as early as April, the borough's neighbourhood boss says.

Councillor Ian Jones said council representatives were to meet with bosses at Serco, the company which is responsible for waste collections in the borough, in January.

They will discuss plans to bid for four machines known as Faeces Intake Disposal Operation vehicles, or FIDOs for short.

The 4x4 buggies can be used off-road and suck up dog mess as they go along.

"The plan is to bid for four, and if it's all agreed we could get them as early as April," Councillor Jones said.

"Hopefully this meeting will be just a formality because we want these machines.

"We hope they will be a huge step forward in reducing dog mess in the borough."

It is understood the machines cost £35,000 each.

Other cities have tried similar approaches to cleaning up dog mess. Different versions of the machines have already been introduced in Derby, Nottingham and Islington.

Charity is in need of party help

A CHARITY in the Black Country needs help to find a venue for its annual party.

Sandwell Mind's service-user group People in Mind, has been unable to find a venue for a party for hundreds of service users.

People in Mind represents Sandwell Mind's 700-plus service users and gives them the voice in how the charity is run.

The party is the social highlight of the year for the service users, as it is the only time they can meet other members in a safe setting.

The prospects of it going ahead are diminishing unless a suitable venue can be found. All possible venues have so far been deemed unsuitable due to size, cost and lack of suitable disabled access. To help call Kirstie Barnes on 0121 565 5605.

Man plummets 15ft down drain shaft

Paramedics tend to the injured man

A MAN had to be rescued after falling 15ft down a manhole in West Bromwich.

He was walking down Dudley Street, near George Salter Academy, when he slipped down the shaft.

Residents living nearby said the man, who was in his 30s, spent an hour underground.

Members of the Hazardous Area Response Team used ropes and specialist lifting equipment to help the man out of the hole.

He was treated at the scene for back pain before being taken to Sandwell General Hospital. The open manhole was cordoned off by workers from Sandwell Council.

One resident said he believed the metal cover could have been stolen.

Simon Jones, aged 32, who was returning home from a nearby petrol station, witnessed the rescue.

"I wondered what was going on when I saw everyone crowding around the manhole and then I saw they were trying to get someone out.

"He was down there more than an hour I was told. He probably couldn't see it was open in the dark. I imagine the cover had been stolen."

Ambulance crews were called to the scene at around 9.50pm on Sunday night.

Spokeswoman Suzie Fothergill said: "On arrival at the scene crews found a man who had fallen into a manhole.

"Using specialist equipment the man was extricated from the hole and was treated at the scene for back pain.

"The man, believed to be in his 30s, was fully immobilised before being conveyed to Sandwell General Hospital for further assessment and treatment."

Devastated family get a new home for Christmas

A WEDNESBURY family who lost everything when a devastating fire destroyed their house had a new home in time to save their Christmas.

Toni Harris, her partner Matt Gregory and their sons Ryan Harris, aged six, and 18-month-old Jack Gregory, lost everything in the blaze that ripped through their home on Saturday, November 23. But the family were able to move to a new property in Remembrance Road just in time for the big day, thanks to the fast work of Sandwell Homes.

Miss Harris, 25, had just put some clothes in the tumble dryer at her Carrington Road home when it burst into flames. She said: "It was terrifying. Luckily the children were in the living room, and my first thought was them.

"I just grabbed them and got out. It just all happened so fast, I just did what I needed to do to make sure the children were safe."

The fire destroyed the ground floor, and caused extensive smoke damage upstairs.

Miss Harris said she was devastated to have lost so many personal items, including her children's hospital tags from when they were born, and family photos.

The young mother, who has recently completed a degree in childhood and family studies at Wolverhampton University, and Mr Gregory, 26, a carer, said that after the fire they tried to keep things as normal as they could for their children.

Worried

She said: "It was hard, particularly for Ryan, because he understood what had happened and had lost his toys."

The couple were convinced they would not have a home for Christmas, but thanks to council chiefs, they moved into their new three-bedroom home just days before.

She said: "We were so worried we would be far away from family and friends, but being here, we are so close to them.

"And it is a lovely house, with a garden, so we are very pleased. We are very grateful to Sandwell Council for sorting it out so fast. "

Sandwell Council's housing boss Councillor Simon Hackett said: "I am delighted that the family were settled in so quickly and that they were comfortable in a new home for Christmas."

Toni, Matt and Ryan with Kelly Morris of Sandwell Homes and Councillor Simon Hackett

Decision on road access is slammed as madness

SMETHWICK councillor Bob Piper has described a planning decision as "madness".

He said allowing an entrance to a development at the Hagley Road-Anderson Road junction was "incredible beyond belief".

Sandwell Council's planning committee approved plans for apartments and a restaurant on the site of the New Talbot pub. The committee accepted a recommendation to allow the entrance to the development in Anderson Road near the junction of Hagley Road.

Highways officers from Sandwell and Birmingham said an entrance in Hagley Road was dangerous. But Councillor Piper said: "I find this advice to be incredible beyond belief.

"Every development between Five Ways and the Kings Head has an entrance on to the Hagley Road, but for this development we are told that it is dangerous.

"Instead they are advising putting an entrance on what officers have already said is a dangerous junction – so dangerous they wouldn't even allow an advertising hoarding. It is complete madness."

NEWS in brief

Video art show due at museum

WORK by a top artist will go on show at Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery in the summer as part of a national scheme.

The venue is one of 17 in the UK to host exhibitions as part of the Artist Rooms on Tour. It will include pieces by video artist Bill Viola, whose show will be at the museum from July 25 to December 1.

Works include items from the Tate and National Galleries of Scotland. Sandwell's lesiure chief, Councillor Linda Horton said: "This is a real coup for Sandwell."

Hospital delays are criticised

SANDWELL Council leader Darren Cooper has criticised the Government for taking so long to approve a £370m super hospital in Smethwick.

The Chancellor George Osborne confirmed in his autumn statement that the hospital would be built but Councillor Cooper said the move had a "bitter-sweet taste."

He said: "Why has it taken so long for the Chancellor to give the scheme the go-ahead?"

Arrest in police drug operation

A 32-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of intent to supply drugs when he was stopped in West Bromwich High Street with 16 bags of cannabis.

Officers used sniffer dogs in the street to target potential dealers as part of a drugs crackdown.

The cannabis was seized and has been sent for analysis, Insp Akeel Najib said.

Inquest open on churchyard man

AN inquest has been opened and adjourned on a 41-year-old man found at a churchyard in Bearwood.

Barry John Pemberton, of Lightswood Road, Bearwood, was discovered at St Mary's Church on December 13, Smethwick Coroners Court heard.

Land sale likely

SANDWELL council chiefs will sell off more land to save money. The land at Tunnel Road and Coppice Street, West Bromwich, will be sold if plans are approved. The Tunnel Road site has five plots, Coppice Street 10.

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THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

WORST Christmas shock. Waking up and discovering you agree with Piers Morgan.

❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

I ONCE visited a school with its own armed guard, as suggested by America's National Rifle Association (and rightly condemned as idiotic by Morgan). The guard was a jovial, slightly overweight soldier sitting in the sunshine outside the head's study in the town of Kiryat Shmona in northern Israel, with his Armalite assault rifle on his knees. The NRA says all schools should have a guard like this to prevent more school massacres. The snag, of course, is that the psychopath preparing to slaughter children knows exactly what is about to happen but the guard does not. In order to kill the children, the gunman would first shoot the guard. No problem.

❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

A PUZZLE from the sales. Why is it the average till operator can hold on to the winter snuffles for ages and then cough or sneeze straight into a handful of your change?

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SIMPLE, isn't it? All you have to do to establish what happened by the main gate to Downing Street is to play the silent CCTV footage of "Plebgate" and try to speak the dialogue between officers and Andrew Mitchell, as reported in the official police log. Paul Merton and Daniel Radcliffe performed it as a playlet on Have I Got News For You (BBC1) and there seemed to be far too many words to fit the time available. David Cameron has had access to the police log and the tape for three months. Did he try making the words fit? If not, why not?

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BEST party-cracker joke: "I wanted to train as a masseur but they said I'd have to start at the bottom."

❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

A READER reports that, quite out of the blue, his wife has been bombarded with begging letters from half a dozen charities. He handles the household bills and correspondence and she never uses the internet. So how have these charities, who have never bothered his wife before, suddenly become aware of her existence? All he can suggest is that his wife has recently started drawing her state pension. Surely someone at the Department of Work and Pensions cannot be supplying details to charities? I wouldn't be in the least surprised. Would you?

❑❑❑❑❑❑❑❑

THE BBC may have millions of pounds to shower on its bosses and senior managers but, at the bottom of the pile, BBC local radio is strapped for cash. From January 7, instead of getting a local programme, all 39 BBC local-radio stations in England and the Channel Islands will get the same three-hour programme. The job of spinning bad news into good news falls to David Holdsworth, the BBC's Controller, English Regions who says : "Expect a mix of great story telling, focussing on people and places, and debates on the issues that really matter to local communities, wherever they are." Or to put it another way, expect lots of listeners to switch off.

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I REFERRED recently to the Queen saving string and wrapping paper at Christmas for the next year's presents. A thought occurred to me as Her Majesty posed for the picture a few days ago with David Cameron's Cabinet. Wouldn't our economy be in better shape if it were in the hands of the 86-year-old lady who saves string, rather than anyone else in the photograph?

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

Joules which started brewing in Stone in 1780

Henry Mitchell and William Butler of M&B

Mitchell's & Butler's had its own fire brigade

Bitter brewery memory

A new book on Britain's lost breweries charts some famous names from the West Midlands. **MARK ANDREWS** talks to the author

IT SEEMS incredible to think that anybody would pay nearly £2 million for a brewery and then pour its beer down the drain.

And it certainly turned out not to be a particularly wise move by Greenall Whitley, when it bought Brierley Hill's much-loved J P Simpkiss brewery, in 1985.

"It's scandalous really, I don't know why they would have bought it," says Chris Arnot, the author of Britain's Lost Breweries and Beers.

Greenall Whitley was a large regional brewer in the north-west of England, which decided the best way to boost its market share was to buy up the smaller, local brewers. And close them down.

The reaction from Black Country drinkers was hostile to say the least. Mary Arnett, who ran The Castle, Lye, recalls how the pub had been doing a healthy lunchtime trade before the takeover.

"But the regulars didn't like the new beers at all, they liked Simpkiss Bitter in particular," she says. "We lost a lot of trade.

"We stuck it out for another 10 months, and then took early retirement. There was a rapid turnover of licensees after that, until the pub closed and they pulled it down."

The demise of the Simpkiss brewery, which was demolished shortly after the Greenall takeover, is one of 30 featured in Arnot's book.

Best

Birmingham-born Arnot is well familiar with the Black Country's famous beers, describing how he would regularly visit the region with his father-in-law during the 1970s to sample the likes of Batham's, Holden's and Simpkiss.

"For me Batham's is still the best, I can't think of a better beer than Batham's," he says, referring to the brewery which still continues to thrive from its base in Brierley Hill.

During the course of writing the book, Arnot spoke to a number of former Simpkiss employees, who each have a fascinating tale to tell about their time at the Dennis Brewery behind the Foley Arms – now the New Wellington – pub in Brettell Lane.

Former drayman Tony Dutton recalls the occasion he had to take brewery owner Dennis Simpkiss's son Jonathan with him, and was warned by Simpkiss senior that under no circumstances should he allow his sports-car loving son to get behind the wheel of the lorry. But probably the most entertaining story comes from former maintenance man Dennis Hale, who recalled the potency of the brewery's famous Old Ale.

An aerial view of the Simpkiss brewery in Brierley Hill – it was demolished shortly after the Greenall Whitley takeover

The former Foley Arms, Brierley Hill – now the New Wellington

Joseph Paskin Simpkiss

Author Chris Arnot – regular visits

"I remember three gas men working outside the Foley Arms one day and coming in at lunchtime to sample the Old," he tells Arnot.

"They had three pints each. But when it was time to go back to work, one of them couldn't stand up. He had to be carried out by his mates."

Mind you, that sounds pretty tame compared to the antics on the last day of Joule's brewery at Stone, near Stafford, in November, 1974. There, the employees marked the closure of their workplace by sinking a few pints of Royal Ale, not far off nine per cent in alcohol content, and then going for a swim in the fermenting vat.

Joule's laid claim to being Britain's oldest brewery, although that is based on the fact that Augustinian monks had been brewing on the site in the 12th century, and had finished long before Francis Joule came along in 1780.

The monks would bless each barrel and mark it with a red cross, which would later become the trademark of the brewery.

Francis's son John became the first English brewer to export to New York – "American servicemen stationed in Stone and Market Drayton during World War Two were somewhat taken aback to find Joule's beers over here," says Arnot. "No doubt they complained it was served too warm."

Joule's was another brewery to suffer after being taken over by a regional giant, having been bought by Bass-Charrington in 1970, and numerous cost-cutting measures were introduced, from replacing flaked maize with wheat flour, and reducing the number of checks on the running heats of the fermentation vessels.

"There had been complaints from publicans," recalls brewery man Tony Heeley. "Customers had been saying that Joule's didn't taste as good as it once did."

Four years after the takeover, Bass decided to close the historic brewery, and transfer production to Burton-upon-Trent.

The closure was not well-received by real ale buffs in the area, with members of the newly formed Campaign for Real Ale branch organising a mock funeral procession through the streets of Stone. Today a supermarket occupies part of the old brewery site.

Biggest

But the biggest of all the Midland breweries featured in Arnot's book is Mitchell's & Butler's, which in its prime had plants in Smethwick, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

The Wolverhampton plant, which produced Springfield bitter, closed in 1991, and was later hit by a devastating fire, while the M&B headquarters in Cape Hill, Smethwick, closed in 2002.

Arnot says that one common theme throughout his research was the fondness which many former brewery workers had for their workplaces.

"They really loved their jobs, despite the fact that they were often doing really hard jobs, moving things around," says Arnot, who is 63.

"Part of that was down to the fact they had quite a fondness for beer, but I think it was also because the breweries looked after their workers, in terms of low-rent houses and sponsored sporting events, there was quite an esprit de corps.

"The brewery owners were quite paternalistic, they were the last of their breed."

One of the interesting things that is evident from Arnot's book is that while the breweries have long disappeared, many of the beers have survived – some of them being reintroduced by enterprising micro-breweries.

The Simpkiss brand, for example, has been bought by Enville Ales, which produces the ale from its brewery just outside Stourbridge, and Joule's was relaunched by former Bass executive Steve Nuttall at Market Drayton in 2009, with the help of Heeley, who dug out the old recipe. You can still buy a pint of M&B too, although it is now produced by Brain's Brewery in Burton upon Trent, while small independent brewers are now brewing at the Springfield and Highgate sites.

And while it's easy to feel nostalgic for the famous old breweries of the Midlands, Arnot says the choice and quality of today's beers is probably better than it has ever been.

"Today's microbreweries use the finest ingredients, whereas that is something the old breweries weren't always on top of. Today it's a more discerning market compared to the old days, when they were simply brewing for the working man."

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Talks are to be held on move of school

PLANS to move a secondary school to a campus almost 10 miles away have moved a step closer, with talks now taking place over the proposals.

Stuart Bathurst Catholic High School, in Wood Green Road, Wednesbury, will move to the site of Oldbury Academy, in Moat Road, if the scheme is given the go-ahead.

Sandwell's education chief Councillor Bob Badham has given permission for the council to enter into formal discussions with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham over the move.

Talks will continue into January.

St Hubert's RC Primary would also move from its current site, in Wolverhampton Road, Wednesbury, as part of the scheme.

The site in Moat Road was formerly home to Oldbury Grammar School, later known as Langley High School, which merged with Warley High School on a site in Pound Road to become Oldbury Academy.

Due to a revamp at Pound Road, pupils will move on to one site in February, leaving the Moat Road site vacant.

The Stuart Bathurst School buildings are in a terrible state, Councillor Bob Badham has said.

Art group show on at centre

A COMMUNITY art group that supports people recovering from mental illness is holding an exhibition at The Public in West Bromwich.

Arts On was started by Sandwell Primary Care Trust but following its relaunch in April, it is attracting a mix of members with and without a history of mental health conditions.

Sandwell PCT senior mental health promotion officer Sasha Gelpi said: "The group has become all-inclusive, actively contributing towards decreasing the stigma surrounding mental health, reducing isolation, and improving mental health and wellbeing.

"Members have gained a great deal of confidence, and we'd like to congratulate them and celebrate their achievements." The exhibition runs until Sunday.

£30,000 of fake tobacco found in crackdown

MORE than 74,000 contraband cigarettes and 32 kilograms of tobacco with a street value of around £30,000 have been seized as part of a trading standards crackdown.

One shop was caught selling the illegal and non-duty paid tobacco with an estimated street value of more than £1,000 during an operation which was carried out in Sandwell by Trading Standards, HMRC and the police.

The tobacco in the West Bromwich shop included around 2,500 cigarettes and more than half a kilo of hand rolling tobacco.

Analysis of counterfeit tobacco products has shown previously that they may contain highly dangerous ingredients such as cyanide, plastic, sand, insects and even rat droppings.

In many cases the fake cigarettes have been found to contain higher levels of tar than genuine ones.

Cabinet member for Neighbourhood Services Councillor Ian Jones said "All cigarettes and tobacco are harmful.

"However people should be aware that fake tobacco is even more hazardous than the real thing because you can never be sure what you are smoking."

The seizures were made during joint operations between trading standards, HMRC and the police during the Sandwell's Safer Six Campaign last month.

Trading standards manager Bob Charnley said: "Fake cigarettes are often half the price of legal ones.

While most people believe they are getting a bargain, many do not realise the effect buying fake tobacco has on them and their community.

"The sale of counterfeit goods is a serious criminal offence which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment.

"My officers will continue to do all they can to prevent illegal sales and stop criminals gaining a competitive advantage at the expense of genuine hard working businesses.

"We urge anyone to report any sales of counterfeit goods by contacting our fakes hotline on 0845 894 1008. You can report anonymously if you wish."

The Safer Six campaign saw a number of partner organisations, including the council, the fire service and the police, joining forces to tackle crime and make the borough safer.

Prompt verdict on fire-hit site is promised by bosses

A DECISION on the future of a Black Country factory which burst into flames, severely damaging homes and cars, will be made soon, bosses have said.

Homes had to be evacuated when flames took hold at the Alcohols Limited factory, in Crosswells Road, Langley, on November 26. The building was left gutted and no decision has yet been made on whether operations will continue at the site until the conclusion of all incident investigations.

And bosses promised residents in the area would be kept "fully apprised" of the situation.

Spokesman for the firm Mark Marshall said the company was waiting for investigations, including the findings of the Health and Safety Executive, to be finalised.

"Once this has been done a decision will be made on the future of the site," he said. "We are expecting the HSE investigation to be complete by early in the New Year.

"Insurance issues will also have to be looked at and then we will be in a position for a final decision on the site to be made.

Damage

"We are continuing to talk with residents affected by the fire."

He said loss adjustors employed by the firm had been in contact with residents who had suffered damage to their properties.

Affected families had to be evacuated from their homes.

Now residents say while they are not against the gin distillery part of the business remaining they want the chemical distribution side of the firm to be moved.

Managing director of the firm Adam Wallis said all options would be looked at and the final decision on the site would not be taken lightly.

Big Mac boss is spat at by thug

POLICE are investigating an attack on a McDonalds manager who was spat at and racially abused by a customer.

The thug abused the manager at a drive-through window at Holyhead Road, West Bromwich, at 2.40am on December 2.

He arrived as a passenger in a taxi and when he was told there would be a short wait for his food, he got out of the car, prised open the restaurant window and launched his assault.

The 43-year-old victim said he was subjected to a torrent of racial abuse before being spat at.

Officers have identified the taxi but not the passenger.

Pc Adam Austin, of West Bromwich police station, said: "There is no excuse for this type of behaviour."

Anyone with information about the incident is asked to call Sandwell police on 101.

Pupils pay tribute to tragic Aidan

Peter Bishop with pupils, front from left, Sam Knott, Chris Horton, Brandon Gilbert, Ryan Ashcroft and Luke Porter wearing red in memory of Aidan

PUPILS at an Oldbury school donned red outfits in tribute to their classmate who died on the school playing fields.

Tividale youngster Aidan Nisbett, aged 15, collapsed while playing football at Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy on November 16, and died later in hospital.

His classmates donned red outfits to pay tribute to him, to raise funds for his funeral and fund a memorial to him which will be installed on the school grounds.

They raised £909.

Red was chosen as Aidan was an Arsenal fan and also due to the close proximity to Christmas. Peter Bishop, acting principal of the school in Lower City Road, said: "We wanted to contribute towards the funeral but also buy a bench or plant a tree in his memory."

Aidan Nisbett, 15, who collapsed playing football

NEWS in brief

Volunteers step up to help group

A COMMUNITY help scheme in Smethwick has attracted more than 20 volunteers.

Soho Victoria Friends and Neighbours is working with local organisations and Sandwell Council to help residents live independently in their own homes.

Twenty six community support volunteers have stepped forward to offer their services.

For further details about the work of Soho Victoria Friends and Neighbours, contact Rohit Mistry on 021 569 7244.

Sign language lessons online

CHILDREN are being given the chance to learn sign language.

Interactive online lesson Monkey Manor has been created by Digital Giving for the national deaf healthcare charity SignHealth. Youngsters can play games on the interactive website.

SignHealth hopes children will use the site and their schools will sign up for the fundraising Sign2Sing event on February 6.

Curtain call for drama society

THE West Bromwich-based Charlemont Drama Society is looking for new members.

The company will be presenting 'Allo 'Allo in May 2013.

Rehearsals will take place in the New Year and the cast will gather from January 8 at Perryfields School in Hollyhedge Road on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

To join in, call Sylvia Hill on 0121 357 4169.

Action urged on junction

ACTION needs to be taken over a dangerous junction in Great Barr, it is claimed. Councillor Keith Linnecor is calling for speed calming at the junction of Aldridge Road, Greenholm Road and Thornbridge Avenue and is to meet Birmingham City Council transport bosses next month.

Lotte's Brum date

FOLK artist Lotte Mullan will perform at Birmingham's Glee Club on April 26 as part of a tour. This is the singer/song-writer's first solo tour. Tickets are on sale now.

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NEWS

200 stray horses are rounded up by councils

MORE than 200 stray horses have been rounded up from the streets of Sandwell and Dudley after new measures to stop them wandering the streets were introduced.

Both boroughs have been plagued by the roaming animals causing a nuisance by walking out in front of cars and trampling through gardens.

Both councils drew up plans to tackle the problem.

In Sandwell, bailiffs have been employed by the council to seize the stray animals.

The move followed complaints about the roaming horses kicking over bins and chopping up gardens in Tipton.

There were also problems on the Wednesbury Oak Estate.

by Heather Large

Secure

But the move proved controversial as horse lovers threatened legal action when their animals were seized.

Council spokesman Dave Lawley said since the start of 2012, 20 stray horses had been collected."

Vets have been called in to sedate horses to make them easier to catch and secure.

Meanwhile in Dudley, police responded to the public after the council found an old by-law giving them the power to remove the animals from roads.

The scheme was launched as a six-month trial last April, but was extended. The rescued horses are taken out of the area to be rehomed.

About 160 were been rounded up and numbers of roaming animals have continued to fall.

Police are now being called out to deal with up to four horses a month.

West Midlands Police spokeswoman Carly Anderson said: "There has been a 68 per cent drop in calls about horses. Every horse is rehomed."

Jo's recipe for success

Jo Evans with pupils Daisy Evans, Harvey College, Joel Cook, Philip Folorunso, Keeley Fereday, Poppy Edmunds, head Lynda Townsend, Allison Morris and Karen Roberts

A SCHOOL cook has found a winning recipe which won a prestigious award for her cookery club and services to the community.

Unsung heroine Jo Evans, of Rowley Hall Primary School, pipped other cooks from across the country to win Community Interaction – Public Sector award at the Blakemore Food Services Catering Awards.

It is in recognition of her services to the community and providing cookery lessons for children and parents. The 47-year-old's sessions included healthy cooking and eating, community cooking classes for residents and runs the after school cooking club.

The mother-of-one said: "This is all about teaching both children and adults the importance of healthy food, and that there is more than fast food. I would not have been able to do this without the support of the school."

The Windsor Road school's business manager Tracey Myers-Horton said: "Jo is a national unsung hero who has soared above and beyond expectations."

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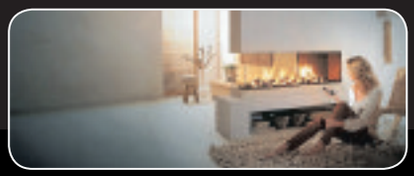

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NEWS

Phased plan to make Metro line affordable

THE long-awaited second line of the Midland Metro tram will be built in phases to keep costs down.

Transport chiefs say they are determined to raise £268 million to take trams from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill and Stourbridge.

They say that breaking the line into phases, going from Wednesbury to Dudley first, would make the scheme more affordable and more likely to get financial backing.

The aim is still to have an 18-stop line and Centro, which oversees public transport, wants to use business rates from new Enterprise Zones in Wolverhampton and Darlaston to cover costs.

The zones give councils the right to keep some of the rates they gather.

Project

It has been 14 years since the original 23-stop line between Wolverhampton and Birmingham Snow Hill was launched.

Geoff Inskip, chairman of Centro, said the extention project was still very much alive.

He said: "We don't need to have all the money if we don't do it all at once. We're looking at raising funds with the local councils through the Enterprise Zones and the business rates.

"Black Country authorities have made it clear that the Wolverhampton spur and taking the Metro to Brierley Hill are important.

"There would need to be a connection from Wednesbury first, where it would meet line one.

"We could take it out to Dudley in a first phase and then on to Brierley Hill later on."

Young dancers entertain

Dance students Chelsea Nock, aged 16, Dana Moore, 15, Beth Venables, 15, Zoe King, 15, Wiktoria Adamczyk, 15, were the organisers of the fundraising dance show

A GROUP of youngsters got out their dancing shoes to put on a show for their fellow pupils at a school in the Black Country.

The Phoenix Dance Show was held at the Clarkes Lane campus of the Phoenix Collegiate Academy in West Bromwich last month.

The performance was organised by year 11 pupils Chelsea Nock, aged 16, and 15-year-olds Dana Moore, Zoe King, Jada Archer, Beth Venables and Wiktoria Adamczyk.

The performance formed part of the youngsters' BTEC dance course.

Credit

The event raised more than £178 and all proceeds will go to Birmingham Hospital's children's ward.

The youngsters raised the money through CD sales, a raffle and refreshments.

Students were entertained with dances which were all choreographed by Emma Pash and were performed by dancers from years seven to 11.

Spokesperson Jo Ault said: "The students have worked really hard and are a credit to themselves and Phoenix Collegiate."

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MEMORIES

Lichfield Passage in the 1960s showing part of the Royal London Building, left, and the now-restored 18th century shops, right, *Picture: Wolverhampton City Council*

An early 1800s John Fullwood drawing of Wheeler's Fold, with the arched entrance from Lichfield Street*

Cottages in Farmer's Fold, taken in 1955 showing the back of Povey's Bakery and Restaurant *Picture: Jim Dowdall, Wolverhampton Photographic Society*

Back-to-back cottages and cobbled yard in Townwell Fold in 1913, looking at the back of Victoria Street*

The Pig and Whistle pub, Wheeler's Fold. Next door can be seen the former Noah's Ark Methodist Meeting House, opened by John Wesley in 1787*

Unfolding the history of alleys and streets

by Anthony and Joyce Perry

YOU may not have noticed the little alleys or streets in Wolverhampton City Centre with the name Fold.

You may think they are dead-ends, or private access-ways. You may not have given them a second thought.

But the name has a meaning. They may not look like they would hold sheep today.

Development and redevelopment over the centuries change towns and cities, even historical, tourist places.

But their history does not disappear, and their remaining unique features from the past deserve preservation.

Wolverhampton's wealth in Mediaeval times was built on the wool and cloth trade, wealth which paid for St Peter's Collegiate Church to be rebuilt on a grand scale in the 14th century, and made grander a hundred years later. Local merchants traded in this country and Europe, there were the different trades-people in the industry, such as tailors, drapers, weavers, spinners, fullers, dyers, plus those who sorted, scribbled and scoured the wool.

Sheep came in from Shropshire and the Welsh Marches for sale in the sheep market, which was possibly in North Street, its old name being Tup Street.

The Folds, off the main medieval streets, served as temporary locations for penning the animals. Each has a story to tell.

Blossoms Fold takes it name from church prebendaries (priests) in the 14th century.

Townwell Fold was the location of four wells serving the townspeople. Wheeler's Fold has different possible origins, and has connections with John Wesley, Charles Dickens and renowned actress Sarah Siddons.

Farmer's Fold is named after 18th century bakers, but has names older than this.

Some of these streets and alleys are well used, well looked after and put to good commercial use, others are in need of refurbishment, bringing back into use and making more well known to the public.

Picking up on this, and using the information researched to produce the book The Folds of Wolverhampton (Brewin Books), the Wolverhampton Civic and Historical Society have begun a website, www.wolverhamptonfolds.co.uk for use by owners, occupiers, th council and the public.

The intention is to make something of a unique feature of the city centre and an important part of Wolverhampton's history.

* Photographs courtesy of Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies.

Woolpack Alley alias Henny's Fold in the 1970s, looking towards the narrow passage into Queen Square. The three story 1850s building was the rear part of Alfred Hall and Son, outfitters

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NEWS

Music man is scent wild by perfume girl's voice

Beth Sherburn at the perfume counter in Merry Hill where she was discovered

SHE'S usually seen behind a perfume counter at the Merry Hill Centre – but Beth Sherburn is on her way to stardom after a record producer overheard her singing at work.

The 21-year-old was at work in Debenhams when she was singing along to a Michael Buble's Christmas classic.

Little did she know that music producer John McLaughlin, behind such acts as Busted, Girls Aloud and Take That, was shopping nearby buying scent for his wife.

He approached her to compliment her on her voice during the trip on November 28, and promptly invited her to work alongside him in his studio.

The 21-year-old from Sedgley has now signed a contract with Purple Circle Records and is set to release a cover of Ordinary World by Duran Duran, her first single, this month.

Chance

Beth, who stayed in her job until Christmas, said the record contract and meeting John McLaughlin is a "dream come true".

"He was just rushing in to get his wife a present so I was very lucky to be in the right place at the right time," she said.

"I am always singing at work – I sing all the time my friends and family can't stop me.

John said: "It was a little miracle as I discovered Beth by chance when I was in Debenhams at Merry Hill.

"I rushed in having stayed over after a meeting and I wanted to get something for my wife when I heard this girl singing to herself.

Beth's promotional picture

He added: "She stopped me in my tracks. I thought she had the most incredible voice. I knew there and then I had to get her into the studio to test out that voice and see if she had real talent."

Beth performed at The Birmingham Repertory Theatre with Matthew Kelly and George Costigan in Don Quixote when she was 14. She also sang in a gospel choir with Katherine Jenkins at The Royal Albert Hall.

She's also a talented musician, and plays saxophone, clarinet, guitar and piano.

Beth has since collaborated with songwriter Jud Mahoney, who has worked with some of the world's leading artists.

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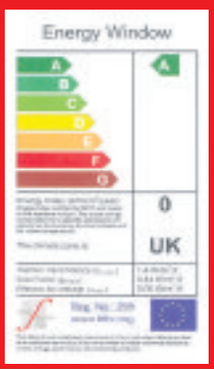

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NEWS

Ofsted team puts failing school in special measures

A WEDNESBURY school is failing its pupils according to school inspectors, and has been placed in special measures.

Wodensborough Community Technology College was visited by Ofsted inspectors last month.

They found that their overall effectiveness was inadequate. Inspector Stephen Walker found that the achievement of pupils, quality of teaching and leadership at the Hydes Road school were all inadequate.

by Naomi Dunning

He found that too many pupils were making slow progress in English and maths.

Boys in particular were making significantly less progress than girls.

Mr Walker reported that those pupils who need additional support were not identified quickly enough, or given the support they needed, and that the specialist provision for disabled pupils was not being used effectively.

Attention

He said: "There are too many lessons when the pace of learning is too slow and the work provided does not challenge students or gain their attention.

Expectations of behaviour are sometimes too low and students are allowed to drift off task and become disengaged."

Mr Walker found that pupils lost attention and misbehaved when the lessons were not planned well enough.

The inspectors also criticised the leadership at the school and said the leaders were not addressing the most serious weaknesses in teaching and the pupils' poor progress.

He also said the governors had not effectively held the school to account for the quality of teaching.

Mr Walker did highlight however, that the new head teacher Stephen Lanckham was putting in systems to improve the progress of pupils and to tackle weak teaching. He also said that there had been a recent improvement in behaviour at the school, and in attendance.

He also praised the way the school used its specialist technology status to provide a good range of work-related courses for pupils in Year 10 and 11. Inspectors will now visit the school on a regular basis.

Brigade's engines likely to be smaller

WEST Midlands Fire Service will buy a further five small brigade engines under plans which were expected to be approved.

The service is trying out three of the new appliances, known as Brigade Response Vehicles.

The smaller vehicles are cheaper and need fewer staff than the fire engine's traditional crew of five and can be deployed to minor incidents, such as bin fires.

The service says the move will save money. There are no plans to reduce the number of fire engines.

The service will see £10.2m worth of cuts between 2011 and 2013, and expects to make £13.5m more between 2013 and 2015 and £11.2m from 2015 to 2017.

Fire Authority chairman John Edwards said: "Our service is very good value for money. On the average council tax band we receive £47, that's less than a pound a week."

Vacant bar is finally bought

A LANDMARK bar in Wolverhampton has been sold to a mystery buyer after being on the market for four years. The Bank, in Lichfield Street, will reopen as a pub after closing in 2008. Trade plummeted after the ban on smoking in public places.

Bin-mad Niall in the driving seat

Niall behind the wheel of a recycling truck on his visit to Sandwell's bin depot

LITTLE Niall Flanagan's Christmas wish came true when he was invited to get behind the wheel of a recycling truck at Shidas Lane bin depot in Sandwell

Niall, who is two and a half, and from West Bromwich, is fascinated by his recycling refuse collectors and bin trucks. He always gets up in time to see them in action.

When Serco, Sandwell Council's waste partner, heard, they invited Niall and his parents to the depot to show him round, and let him try the driver's seat of a truck.

Paula Flanagan, Niall's mum, said: "He is absolutely bin mad and helps put the bins out then waits in the morning when our collection is due.

"Thanks to Serco his Christmas wish has come true. We would like to thank all the staff involved."

Nightclub owner's effort is paying off

VISITOR numbers have risen by 25 per cent at a nightclub which was saved after going into administration last year.

The Nightingale Club in Kent Street, Birmingham, was bought 12 months ago by Lawrence Barton.

The Birmingham businessman, whose family business GB Holdings Ltd runs five other venues in the Southside area of the city, says he has invested heavily in the club and the hard work is paying off.

Mr Barton said: "Footfall has grown by 25 per cent since taking over at the end of last year.

The club now regularly attracts more than 1,000 clubbers most Saturdays."

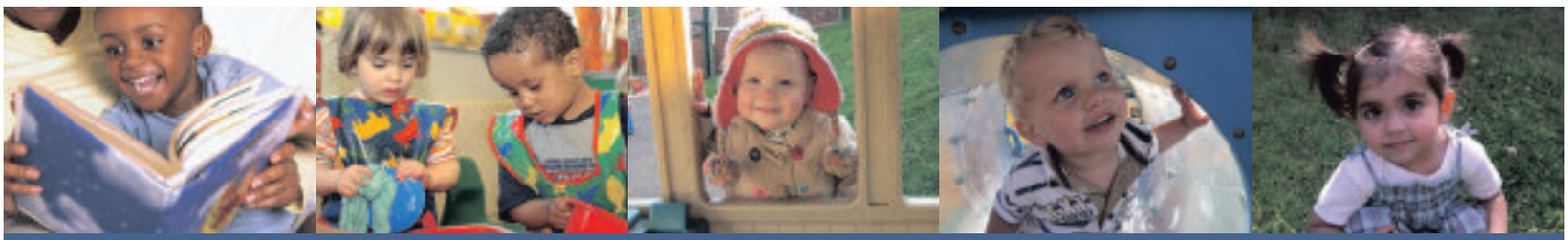
The business was sold to the highest bidder for an undisclosed sum by administrator Zolfo Cooper.

The buy-out secured 50 jobs at the club, which dates back more than 40 years and has attracted stars such as Graham Norton, Alan Carr and Sir Ian McKellen.

The club, in the heart of Birmingham's gay village, opened in 1969.

Date for Amy

SINGER songwriter Amy MacDonald will bring her 2013 tour to Birmingham in March. The star has confirmed she will perform at Birmingham's Symphony Hall on March 1.



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COMMERCIAL FEATURE

Don't be disappointed - choose Choices Windows

The home improvement market is changing and the demand for more choice in colour and suitability of PVC-U doors and windows is growing. Fashionable additions such as orangeries are increasingly desirable, as more people look for ways to improve their home.

Established since 1994, Tipton Windows & Conservatories Ltd, trading as Choices , believe that the latest trends are important, but quality products and exceptional service will always be paramount, which this family run business have proven over nearly two decades.

Situated on Sedgley Road West in Tipton, the founder and company Managing Director Nathan Beddows started the business from scratch at the early age of 19 working out of the very same premises as he does today, He explains his passion:

"I cannot stress enough how much pride we take in every window, door, conservatory, orangery we manufacture and install."

With its roots in manufacturing, the business started more than 19 years ago, and right from the very start an emphasis has been placed on supplying only the finest and most energy-efficient products, but still remaining affordable.

"Our commitment extends beyond the manufacturing process to the design and installation of doors, windows, conservatories and other home improvement services," explains Nathan.

"For some customers we supply new windows and doors, for others we provide a complete home improvement service from building extensions and fitting kitchens, to designing and installing conservatories and more recently Orangeries," says Nathan.

One tremendously satisfied customer is Rick Houghton. Having being recommended to Choices Windows by colleagues at work he employed them to carry out extensive work at his home, he is keen to share his experiences and commend the team involved.

"Every stage of the process was excellently planned and we received nothing but the best service from start to finish. The tradesmen were outstanding and we were so impressed that we handed over our keys and went on holiday whilst the work was being carried out."

Rick and his family were absolutely thrilled and utterly delighted with the results on their return.

"We are so grateful to Nathan and his team for transforming our home into something we could only have dreamed of," remarked Rick.

Keen to keep ahead in the style stakes, Nathan is ever aware of the latest designs, materials and colours on offer, and strives to make these available to his customers.

"Many people are now opting for stylish coloured PVC-U, influenced by timeless muted 'National Trust' tones. Sage green, gun metal grey and cream are all becoming very fashionable alongside the traditional clean bright white," explains Nathan.

Fitting new PVC-U windows can be a good choice for the environment as well as for your home. Replacing dated double glazing can help save money on heating bills and reduce the carbon footprint of a residence.

"We offer A-rated energy-efficient windows and doors which can help save up to £250 from heating bills in the first year alone. They not only reflect heat back into the house, but also retain heat from solar gain," remarks Nathan.

"As a company we pride ourselves on giving old fashioned value for money and excellent service, we can undertake the majority of jobs and because we manufacture in house at our premises unlike the majority of our local competitors it enables us to have full control so we can manage your project from start to completion ensuring your experience is stress free".

"After many years in the Double glazing business we have seen a lot of competitors come and go, unfortunately leaving many customers without any warranty, after parting with their hard earned cash. Any customer who is considering having any home improvements should choose carefully and do their homework on the company they are considering, ensure if you part with money upfront it is protected by a Fensa approved deposit indemnity scheme, ask to visit previous customers but most importantly don't be fooled by the salesmen's tactics of a tempting "sign on the night low price offer" that the double glazing industry is notorious for "advises Nathan.

The old sayings are always the best - after a low price is long forgotten, poor quality long remains".

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Action plan is being drawn up to protect Market Place

AN action plan will be drawn up to protect the future of Wednesbury Market Place, after English Heritage said it was deteriorating and its history was at risk of being lost.

Sandwell Council is calling in experts to review the state of the Market Place and put together a bid for Heritage Lottery funding to bankroll improvements.

by Lisa Wright

Outside help will be asked to draw up a schedule of improvements to preserve the area's character and review the authority's use of planning laws to protect its heritage from undue development.

The cost of the exercise is not yet known.

Guidance

But the authority is inviting expressions of interest from firms who can put together in-depth research.

Experts will need to write guidance on how the council uses rules protecting the area as a conservation area.

Consultants will need to decide if the boundary of rules now in place should be extended to include north of the town including High Bullen, and the south to include the Town Hall and civic buildings in Holyhead Road for future generations.

The move comes after English Heritage placed Wednesbury Market Place on its Heritage At Risk Register for 2012.

Though its current condition was described as fair, it was also seen to be deteriorating.

Ward Councillor Olwen Jones said: "As councillors we welcome anything to get external money into the town to make it a more vibrant place and preserve its historic character."

Families to get help from new food bank

FAMILIES in Wednesbury who are struggling to make ends meet in the economic downturn are benefiting from a food bank which has been launched in the town.

Breaking Bread has opened in Walsall Street.

Vacant shop units have been taken over and transformed to create the new premises.

The shop units at 93 and 94 Walsall Street were most recently used as Wednesbury Property Shop by Sandwell Homes but have been vacant since January 2011.

Sandwell Council has offered the premises to a community project called The Priory Family Centre to run the food bank in return for a peppercorn rent.

The scheme will not only help families struggling to afford the basics, but is also intended to offer retail work experience to the longer term unemployed people and will be run by a project manager.

Club's home

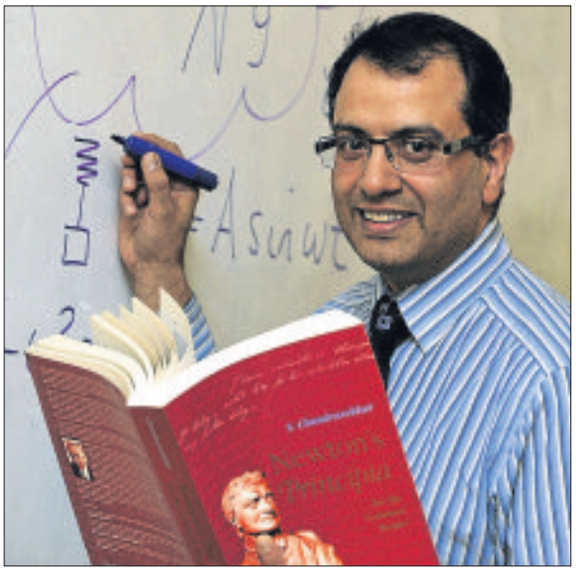
WODENSBOROUGH Boxing Club in Wednesbury which has been looking for a new home for two years, finally has a permanent home at the former Mesty Croft housing office in Oxford Street. Spokesman Stephen O'Rourke said the club was now looking for sponsors.

Bombing memorial mystery

A MYSTERY stone memorial in honour of 13 people killed during First World War bombings in Wednesbury in 1916 has been erected in Wood Green Cemetery where the victims of the bombs are buried. Fred Barnfield of Wednesbury War Memorial Group said: "We don't know who's done it but we applaud whoever it is."

The bombs were intended for Liverpool but the Germans got it wrong. The bombs landed in King Street area.

Honour for inspirational teacher



Baldev Jandu, who is head of physics at Wood Green Academy in Wednesbury

AN inspirational teacher of 25 years has been honoured for overhauling a school physics department.

The Institute of Physics rewarded Wood Green Academy's Baldev Jandu with teacher of the year accolade after he was nominated by staff from the department he runs.

The number of students taking physics at A-Level at the Wednesbury school has doubled due to Mr Jandu's work, which has included placing an emphasis on attracting more girls to take up the subject.

Mr Jandu picked up the honour during the Institute of Physics Awards at a ceremony held in London, which was attended by BBC presenter and physicist Brian Cox.

He joined seven other teachers from around the UK who accepted the prestigious awards, and said he was deeply honoured to do so.

"I'm proud to win the award and everyone in the department is delighted – they seem to think I'm some kind of celebrity now," 50-year-old Mr Jandu said.

"Hopefully I've done a lot over the years which has made an impact."

As part of his overhaul Mr Jandu introduced more activities and helped to modernise the department.

Staffies exhibition open after a revamp

A FAMOUS dog exhibition has been relaunched in Wednesbury after its home was given a revamp.

The Staffordshire Bull Terrier Exhibition at The Old Post Office, in Albert Street, has reopened following a six-month absence for redecoration of the building.

The mayor and mayoress of Sandwell, Councillor Keith Davies and his wife Pat, reopened the exhibition, along with the Staffordshire Regiment's mascot a three-year-old Staffordshire Bull Terrier called Watchman V.

Group patron John Allen said: "A great job has been done to refurbish the room as well as work by the group to bring in new showcase units. We get people all around the world coming to see us. Now they can come back."

The exhibition group has been running for 11 years, and moved to The Old Post Office five years ago. The exhibition is open on Saturdays from 11am to 3pm.

Dates for sales

A TABLE-TOP sale will be held at Wednesbury Town Hall, Holyhead Road, on January 6 and 13.

The events will run from 10am to 2pm to raise money for the voluntary group Wednesbury Celebrates. Tables are £5. To book a table call Wednesbury South Councillor Elaine Costigan on 0789 119 6199.

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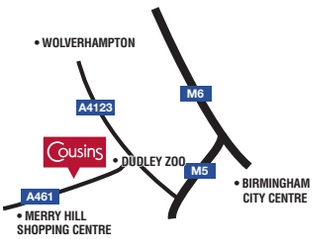

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ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

Busy end to the year for Moat Farm Junior pupils

Albion star Marc-Antoine Fortune with Moat Farm pupils at the opening of Albion Foundation education facility

DECEMBER was a busy month for the pupils of Moat Farm Junior School with many special events taking place in school and with our trust partners.

On December 5 we had an excellent turnout for the Friends of Moat Farm Christmas Fayre and a selection of our pupils entertained crowds at the opening of the new Albion Foundation educational facility in Smethwick with their rendition of a selection of carols.

The school's annual Christmas play Panto Crime was a huge success with our dedicated team putting on performances for parents and pupils throughout the last week of term.

The term ended on a high note with pupils being rewarded with Christmas parties, discos and a film show and those classes who achieved the best attendance and punctuality rewarded with a trip to the cinema.

We are now looking forward to another exciting term this spring and will be welcoming pupils back from their Christmas break on Monday.

We will be offering an additional 30 places in Year 3 this September, increasing our Year 3 pupil numbers to 120 from the existing 90.

If you would like to take advantage of these additional places pick up an application form from school or go online to www.sandwell.gov.uk/school admissions by the closing date of Tuesday, January 15.

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Moat Farm Junior School Trust

'Where We Prepare For Tomorrow By Achieving Today'

The Governing Body is pleased to announce that we are expanding and creating an extra Y3 class from September 2013 when the Y3 numbers will increase to 120.
Anyone interested in seeking a place should contact us for further information and an application pack before the closing date of the **15th January 2013**

- In conjunction with our Trust partners The Albion Foundation, Barnardo's and Sandwell College we offer a diverse and dynamic curriculum.
- Rated 'Good' by Ofsted in April 2010 who commented on the 'outstanding range of activities within the curriculum'.
- Excellent school attendance currently over 96% which is well above the Local Authority average.
- Good SATs results with pupil attainment usually above that of the Local Authority average.
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Moat Farm Junior School Trust, Brookfields Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B68 9QR
Call or Email for a Prospectus and Application Pack
Telephone: 0121 552 1215
Email: laura.braznel@moatfarm-jun.sandwell.sch.uk

LETTERS

Bus firms know nothing of people's needs

NOW that the dust has settled on the bus changes in Sandwell, it appears obvious that Centro and National Express have little or no interest in the needs of the travelling public.

We have duplication of routes and the 53 and 122 routes are seriously short of bus stops and thus information on bus times.

Sandwell's premier rail station, Smethwick Galton Bridge, still has limited access for many Sandwell residents. I know all buses cannot be routed past Galton Bridge station, but one cannot help feeling that a golden opportunity was missed when the 129 was introduced.

Both Centro and National Express had had suggestions that the then 447, instead of duplicating the 448 down West Park Road and on to West Bromwich, could be diverted via Holly Lane and Oldbury Road past the station, thus serving many people with access to Galton Bridge and stations on the Old G.W.R. & L.M.S. Lines places like Worcester, Stratford, Leamington, Birmingham, Wolverhampton Liverpool and Aberystwth.

But no, Centro and National Express when they introduced the 129, routed it down West Park Road and Mallin Street to West Bromwich along with the New 46, 48 and 49 (Mallin Street).

Yes a golden opportunity was missed.

It really is a pity that these routes are worked out by people in offices who appear to know little or nothing about people's needs.

The public is expected to not only put up with this, but pay for the privilege as well.

Ewart J Johnson,
Thuree Road,
Smethwick.

Manage economy properly

EVERYWHERE you go it's "by one get one free" or "three for the price of two".

If the Government managed the economy properly instead of pandering to the rich elite's demands and taxed everyone fairly, there would be no need for sales.

There would be no need for austerity measures if the Government stopped giving money away and looked after British interests first. No wonder people are disillusioned.

Charles Vermont,
Whitehouse Street,
Tipton.

Leaflet overkill

ON Monday the council left a leaflet for Christmas and New Year's Day collections. On Tuesday Serco attached one to a bin. On Wednesday Serco left another in the letter box. Can I apologise to the Brazilian natives over the loss of their rainforest?

Robert William White,
Tompstone Road,
West Bromwich.

LETTERS to the Editor

POST
Sandwell Chronicle, Chronicle Editorial, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1ES

E-MAIL
sandwellchronicle@expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number of the writer. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Thanks to hospital teams for caring

I AM once again writing in praise of a hospital. On Friday November 23, I was suffering from a violent bout of sickness. The emergency (car) ambulance arrived almost immediately after being called, after a few questions the paramedics arrived. They took me to Russells Hall Hospital where I was seen at once by a doctor and I was admitted to Ward B5 where these angel nurses looked after me.

I am 77and I was treated with the utmost respect and dignity by all, and I would especially like to thank Dr Paul Stonelake and Dr Laura Paton and their team and also the staff in the ultra sound scan x-ray department. I just can't praise these lovely people enough.

I was discharged on November 28. My thanks also to the physiotherapist who walked me along for five mins on my discharge to see if I was okay at walking.

My thanks, last but not least, to the ambulance crew who took me to the hospital. They were so pleasant and cheerful. If I have missed anyone out forgive me. God bless you all.

Mrs Anita Williams,
Sedgley Road East, Tipton.

Let's do what is best for Britain

I READ the letters in the paper every day and rarely see any letters for staying in European Union.

And now we are on the verge of getting gas by fracking (fracturing the ground).

This could bring wealth to the UK, so before it all gets wasted going across the Channel, let's get out of Europe.

This country still has large amounts of coal that could be used for power stations.

Why we bother with wind farms when we only contribute to global warming by 1.4 per cent is beyond me, when India, the US and China are building power stations almost as fast as we can put up a wind turbine.

Let's get our economy back on track by doing what's best for us.

Richard Chance,
Walk Lane,
Wombourne.

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CLUB NEWS

Choir and soloist in fine voice at service

WEST MIDLANDS FEDERATION OF TOWNSWOMEN

THE West Midlands Federation of Townswomen's Guilds held its annual carol service on December 8 at St Thomas's Church Stourbridge.

The service was well attended and enjoyed by the congregation.

Chairman Margaret Brookes welcomed invited guests the Lady Mayoress of Dudley, Michelle Mottram and the Federation President Jan Wynn.

Lay minister Hilary Savage led the service and the organist was John Payne.

Wollaston Guild choir and their soloist Ann Tomlinson sang a selection of seasonal hymns and carols. Also 'Les Oiseaux' a local choir from Brierley Hill sang their selection of carols.

The Federation chairman Margaret Brookes thanked everyone for attending and invited them to the Church Hall for tea and mince pies following the service.

We hope everyone had a very Merry Christmas. We would also like to take the opportunity to wish everyone a Happy and healthy New Year from everyone within the West Midlands Federation along with our good wishes for 2013.

Cheque handed out to Promise Dreams

Previous chairman Isabel Mason with Amy Johnson, from Promise Dreams

HIGHGATE LADIES PROBUS CLUB

THE club held its Christmas meeting on December 10. Entertainment was provided by club members Sylvia Aston and Isabel Mason who are both trained singers and sang Christmas carols and songs from the shows.

The members were invited to join in and did so with gusto. Another club member Jean Davies gave a humorous Christmas reading. During the meeting a cheque for £100 was presented to Amy Johnson a representative from Promise Dreams, the chosen charity of last year's chairman Isabel Mason, and which supports sick children.

Members in festive mood

K'FORD TOWNSWOMEN

MEMBERS were in festive mood at the December meeting.

Four guests were welcomed and Josie Smith was thanked for providing lovely seasonable floral arrangements.

It emerged that work had begun on building a well for a family in Cambodia. When completed it will bear a plaque with the guild's name.

Following the necessary business the various sections announced their forthcoming events. Mince pies and mulled wine were then served ahead of the main event.

Catherine Tabener and her accompanist Ian Chamberlain entertained with songs from the shows and some seasonable numbers. Kath Turner gave thanks.

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NEWS

Appeal made to help honour unsung heroes

THE search is on again for young people in Sandwell who are shining stars in their communities.

Professionals working with young people are being encouraged to nominate teenagers who deserve recognition for their achievements.

The Sandwell Teenagers Achieve Recognition (STAR) accolades will celebrate the hard work and dedication of the borough's teenagers.

The awards aim to honour young people who have made great personal achievements or contributed to society.

Young people are also encouraged to nominate adults who they feel have gone the extra mile to support them, whether that is a teacher, youth worker, learning mentor or organisation.

Ceremony

The nomination categories are: Young Carer Award; Volunteering Award; Education Award; Sports Award; Performing Arts; Anti-Bullying Award; Bravery and Courage; Adult Star; Long Service Dedication Award; Star of Sandwell.

The awards ceremony, by invitation only, will take place on March 22 from 6pm – 11pm.

A search is also on for talented youngsters to perform at the event. The entertainers will include young people who have been nominated for the performing arts award.

The closing date for nominations is 5pm on January 25.

For more information on the awards and nominations, and for a nomination form, log on to www.justyouth.org.uk

Pair put in effort to land an award

TWO members of Wednesbury Youth Council, Aimee Smallman and Louise Swinfen, won an award at the 2012 Changing Our Lives Awards.

The Love and Laughter award, being given for the first time, was in memory of the late Liz Mabley, who worked for the local community in Sandwell for many years.

Aimee and Louise were honoured for the work they have been doing as the driving force behind Wednesbury Youth Council.

They also volunteered to support the council's young people's services at the Sandwell Community Show at Sandwell Valley in August.

Councillor Linda Horton, Sandwell Council's cabinet member for leisure services, said: "I am delighted that Aimee and Louise have been recognised for their wonderful efforts and I am certain that Liz Mabley would have been very proud of them."

Raise concerns

PEOPLE in the Cradley Heath and Old Hill area can hear from the council and police, and raise any concerns at a neighbourhood forum meeting on January 9 from 6.30pm to 8pm at the Cradley Heath Salvation Army building in Meredith Street, Cradley Heath.

Aladdin promises night of family fun

Abanazer played by Michael Crump casts a spell over unsuspecting Aladdin, alias Toni Bird

ALADDIN is about to land his magic carpet on the Oldbury Rep stage for a traditional pantomime.

The hero will try to outwit the evil Abanazer and his unusual allies, a group of grumpy aliens from a distant galaxy.

With the help of the Genies of the Lamp and of the Ring, Aladdin battles for fame and fortune so that he can marry the Emperor's daughter, Princess Jasmine.

It was written by Oldbury Rep's Doreen Bastable, of Halesowen, who is celebrating 70 years as a member of the company – and she has been chairman for 36 years.

The production runs from January 11 to 19, with matinees on Saturday January 12 and 19, and January 13, at 2.30pm. Evening performances start 7.30pm.

Tickets are still available for Monday to Thursday evenings with a few left for weekend performances.

Tickets are £9, concessions £8.

Ring the theatre box office on 0121 552 2761.

Campaign on flu jab is stepped up by film

HEALTH campaigners in Sandwell have released a video urging people to get a flu jab this winter.

The Sandwell Primary Care Trust and Sandwell Council want to ensure those who are most vulnerable protect themselves and others by being vaccinated against flu.

Pregnant women, people over 65, and those with a long-term health condition, should get the jab as soon as possible, say the experts.

Healthcare workers, carers, and parents of children aged six months or older who are in an at-risk group should also have the jab.

Those living in a residential or nursing home should be vaccinated to prevent the rapid spread of flu among residents.

Sandwell's director of public health John Middleton said: "Flu can be very serious, especially for those who are at risk of complications."

To see the video, log on to http://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/2Vi_9erat7E?rel=0

Eyesore land

RESIDENTS have complained about an eyesore patch of land near Sutherland Road, Cradley Heath. One said that there was an "immense amount of rubbish" there.

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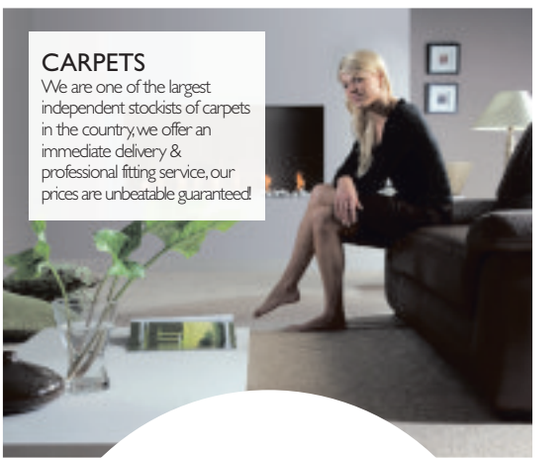

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NEWS

The heat is on when it comes to thefts of oil

Check the levels of your heating oil regularly, don't wait until your system stops to find out oil has been stolen

WITH the seemlingly endlessly rising price of all types of fuel, including heating oil West Midlands homeowners are being warned to be vigilant as it may be an attractive target for theft.

Several recent incidents have seen thieves target quiet, rural communities, siphoning fuel from oil storage tanks outside homes, leaving them with little or no fuel.

Most victims have been completely unaware anything was wrong until their heating stopped working.

The Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) – the body representing the oil heating and cooking industry - urged homeowners to be aware and to take precautions to protect their oil. An OFTEC spokesman said: "Usually it's only when people run out of oil and their heating stops that theft becomes apparent. Making a regular note of your oil levels and taking simple preventative measures will help to make sure that you are not the victim."

OFTEC recommends people should:

- Check the fuel levels regularly.
- Lock the tank. Most tanks can be locked at the inspection cover. Alockable filler cap can be retro-fitted.
- Install security lighting around the tank.
- Consider having an alarm which will warn if oil levels drop suddenly.
- Be vigilant after a delivery - some distributors have said their delivery vehicles are followed. Thieves may also return to steal replacement oil following an initial theft.
- Plant shrubs or use fence panels to hide the tank, but make sure any screening should be a minimum distance away from the tank so it doesn't cause a fire hazard.
- Report any suspicious activity to the police.

Theft of heating oil tends to be a rural problem and OFTEC estimates around 177,000 homes in the West Midlands rely on oil for heating.

Take good care this winter

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Advice and treatment for complaints including minor cuts, bruises, burns, scalds; muscle and joint injuries, coughs, colds: headaches; stomach ache, indigestion, constipation, vomiting and diarrhoea; ear, nose and throat problems; eye problems; skin complaints, head lice and nappy rash; genito-urinary complaints and pregnancy testing, 'morning-after' pill and sexual health advice.

Contact your GP or GP out of hours service

GP Surgery

For most medical problems phone your GP practice for advice or to make an appointment. You should expect to see a GP within 48 hours.

GPs visit patients at home only if they decide there is a medical need. If your surgery is closed and you need urgent advice or treatment call NHS Direct or the GP out-of-hours service.

GP out-of-hours

If you need help outside normal hours, phone your GP and follow the recorded advice.

This service is for medical problems too urgent to wait until your own GP practice is next open.

You will be given advice over the phone and if necessary arrangements will be made for you to be seen.

Serious injury, sudden severe illness or medical emergency

Go to your nearest hospital A&E department

A&E

Only go to a hospital A&E department in the event of an accident or emergency.

An emergency is a critical or life-threatening situation such as:

- unconsciousness
- suspected broken bones
- heavy blood loss
- suspected heart attack
- deep wounds - such as a stab wound
- breathing difficulties
- chest pain
- head injuries

If you are unsure whether a health problem is an emergency needing A&E treatment then call your GP or NHS Direct for advice.

Call 999 for the ambulance service

999 ambulance

Call 999 for an ambulance if the patient:

- has had chest pains for more than 15 minutes
- is not breathing/is having difficulty breathing/is choking
- is unconscious
- is bleeding heavily
- is in severe abdominal pain
- bleeding from the vagina and could be pregnant
- is in the final stages of labour
- may have had a stroke, fit or convulsion
- may have taken an overdose
- has severe burns
- has suspected head or spinal injuries
- has had a severe allergic reaction

Further instructions will be given over the phone by a specially trained call taker and, if appropriate, an ambulance will be sent.

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FURNITURE Village
BRAND LEADERS

Decision on homes scheme is imminent

A DECISION on a controversial scheme to build 175-homes in village near Stourbridge will be made next week – after the original outcome was deferred.

Hundreds of residents in Hagley have protested against the plans by Cala Homes.

They have also marched on the home of landowner Lord Cobham to air concerns that the influx of new families would push village services beyond breaking point. Many attended a planning committee meeting on December 3.

But the meeting at Bromsgrove District Council had to be cancelled after a barrister who was acting on behalf of both Clent and Hagley parish councils presented documentation to the committee members.

It claimed that, because the land was earmarked to be removed from the green belt for development, a public forum would need to rule upon whether it was economically, socially and environmentally "sustainable" before any planning application was decided.

Now Bromsgrove District Council will discuss the plans on January 7 and The chairman of Hagley Parish Council has urged residents to turn out to a meeting.

Steve Colella said: "The objections have been loud and clear – over 1,400 letters of objection and a 4,000-name petition can't all be wrong."

Seven super slimmers see in the New Year as new men

THESE Magnificent Seven super slimmers saw the New Year in as new men.

By swapping fatty foods for fresh fruit and veg the Black Country seven lost more than 40st between them.

Carer and chef **Glen Willetts**, aged 52, of Cradley Heath, lost more than 8st and lost 12ins from his waistline after being referred to a slimming class by his doctor two years ago.

Changes to his lifestyle including switching to skimmed milk, eating plenty of vegetables and healthy breakfasts.

He said: "I feel a lot better, and I love being able to buy more fashionable clothes."

He was tipping the scales at 22st 7lb but now weighs 13st 10lbs.

Swimming

Father-of-seven **Keith Darnley**, aged 52, of Hasbury, Halesowen, had to use a mobility scooter before deciding to lose weight.

But after dropping more than 8st he goes swimming and walking, and took part in the Halesowen Fun Run.

He said he swapped McDonalds breakfasts for cereals with yogurt and fruit or wholemeal toast with mushrooms and tinned tomatoes. He used to weigh 22st 10lb but now weighs 14st 3lb.

Hospitality operations manager **Kevin Herbert**, aged 39, of Quinton, lost 4st after joining Slimming World. He said: "Losing the weight has given me more confidence." He added: I am considering a triathlon next year."

He dropped from 20st 11lb to 16st 10lbs.

Steelworker **Chris Heathcock**, aged 42, of Hob Green, Stourbridge lost 4st 2.5lbs. His waistline went from 44 ins to 34. He joined Slimming World in January and got to his target weight in 11 months by eating more healthily and exercising. He said: "I'm so much more active now. I've even taking up cycling with my daughters Caitlin and Lauren."

Architect **Jonathan Lowe**, aged 31, of Halesowen, lost 5st. He switched from cheese sandwiches and pasties at lunch, to soups and salads. He went from 19st 12lbs to 14st 12lbs.

Electrical engineer **Adrian Harper**, aged 40, of Lutley, Halesowen, lost 4st 1lb. He said: "I feel like a different person.

He used to weigh 18st 1lb but now weighs 14st.

David Lacey, aged 60, of Oldswinford, cut down on white bread and beer to lose more than 4st. His weight dropped from 17st 9lbs to 12st 12lbs.

Kerry Morgan of Slimming World, said: "These men are our Magnificent Seven. We are very proud of their achievements."

Keith Darnley, 52

Glen Willetts, 52

Adrian Harper, 40

Chris Heathcock, 42

Kevin Herbert, 39

Jonathan Lowe, Kevin Herbert, Adrian Harper, Glen Willetts, Keith Darnley, David Lacey, and Chris Heathcock have lost 40 stone between them at slimming classes

David Lacey, 60, who lost four stones

Jonathan Lowe, 31, lost five stones

Students box clever with help for school

BUDDING engineers at a Cradley Heath school have created a series of interactive boxes to help pupils at a special school find their way round their building.

The students from Ormiston Forge Academy, Wrights Lane, presented the boxes to Meadows Sport College, Oldbury, at a recent ceremony.

The boxes use literacy symbols to depict a room's function, along with an engraving of the room's name and a button to press to hear it.

Forge students also decided to use the Dudley Road school's colours on the boxes along with an engraved logo.

Meadows principal Gordon Phillips said: "For our students, to be able to find and identify rooms and areas in the school is a learning experience.

"These boxes will have a huge impact on the lives of the children at our school."

Ormiston principal Andrew Burns said: "The opportunity to do something like this with a real life purpose has made a difference to both schools.

"They are now starting to work together to the benefit of both, and we will be doing more."

Forge student Usama Meraj demonstrated the boxes to the group.

She said the boxes would help the students to develop.

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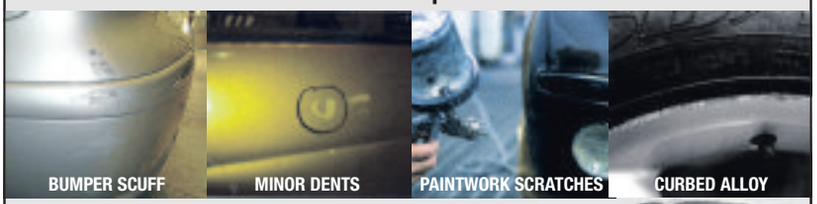

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LIFESTYLE

Savvy shopping tips to help survive the sales

Remember, clothes are in the sale for a reason

Make sure you try clothes on

WHEN the sales banners go up and the red price tags appear, it's easy to get carried away.

However, here's your guide to a successful day at the bargain counter.

BEFORE YOU SHOP

● Keep a list of items you like or need, but you can't afford at full price. Then you'll know exactly where to look when the sales start.

● If there's a particular shop you'd like to visit, find out in advance when its sale starts. Some retailers hold early bird openings or sneak previews for loyalty card holders.

If you sign up for a store card, however, make sure you read its terms and conditions.

● Do your homework by reading consumer reviews for any homewares or electronic items. Also, look out for future trends. If you know what kind of colours are likely to be big next year, you can look out for items in these colours on the sale rails.

● Find out if any of the items you're after will be available online.

Some shops will have more of a selection online than in-store and, if they offer free delivery, you'll save on transport and parking costs.

● If you are heading out to the shops, draft a battle-plan for the day.

Work out where to park or get off the bus, which order to visit the shops, and when and where to stop for a refreshment break and sit-down.

ITEMS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN THE JANUARY SALES

● Trendy items are on the sale rail for a reason, so look instead for everyday basics; wardrobe essentials such as jeans, blazers and shirts.

● Look out for toiletry gift sets. Once you've liberated them from their festive packaging these items might come in handy this year.

● January sales are great for picking up cut-price bed linen, towels or duvets. Stick to bright whites which never go out of fashion.

● Don't just pile into the town centre, but stop by the garden centre or the home improvements superstore.

● Stock up on next year's Christmas cards, wrapping paper and ribbons at knock-down prices. Simple red or gold gift bags or paper can even be used throughout the year for birthday presents or Valentine's Day.

● Check out the food hall of big department stores for fancy food or booze with a shelf-life. A Christmas cake can be frozen and re-iced for Easter.

● Stocking filler DVD films and box sets will be cut-price come January, so buy some for birthday presents

● Buy clothes and shoes your kids can grow into. Children's clothing is more timeless and practical

BACK AT HOME

You may want to collapse on the sofa and put your feet up, but being organised at this stage is also crucial. Most pressing is to try on any sale clothes you've bought. You may decide you don't like them after all.

● Be honest with yourself. If there's anything you're not going to use or wear, take it back while you still know where the receipt is.

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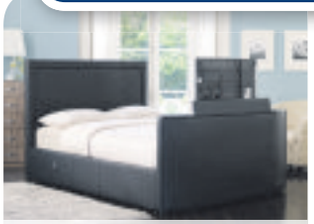

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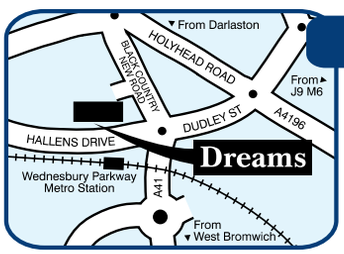

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We	2	9	16	23	30
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• March •					
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• February •					
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• April •					
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Su	7	14	21	28	

• June •					
Mo		3	10	17	24
Tu		4	11	18	25
We		5	12	19	26
Th		6	13	20	27
Fr		7	14	21	28
Sa	1	8	15	22	29
Su	2	9	16	23	30

• August •					
Mo		5	12	19	26
Tu		6	13	20	27
We		7	14	21	28
Th	1	8	15	22	29
Fr	2	9	16	23	30
Sa	3	10	17	24	31
Su	4	11	18	25	

• October •					
Mo		7	14	21	28
Tu	1	8	15	22	29
We	2	9	16	23	30
Th	3	10	17	24	31
Fr	4	11	18	25	
Sa	5	12	19	26	
Su	6	13	20	27	

• December •					
Mo		2	9	16	23 30
Tu		3	10	17	24 31
We		4	11	18	25
Th		5	12	19	26
Fr		6	13	20	27
Sa		7	14	21	28
Su	1	8	15	22	29

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Ideal for All provides a range of services to promote independent living and good health & wellbeing. Call in or contact us if you need help and advice on any disability related issues. If you are disabled or a carer for someone with disabilities we are here to help you.

How we can help

Information and equipment

Ideal for All has a friendly and helpful information service giving you advice on all kinds of disability related issues. Our equipment duty service is available every weekday morning from 10.00 to12.00, providing specialist advice and equipment. Our occupational therapist can help assess, maintain and improve your independence. Ideal for All also offers support, advice and a range of equipment for people that are deaf or hard of hearing.

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Nursery is rated good by Ofsted

A TIPTON nursery was rated good by school inspectors.

The nursery, Tiddlywinks Kiddy's in Park Lane, was visited by Ofsted inspectors on November 26.

They found the provision for the youngest children was good. They also priased the nursery for its well-designed playrooms.

Lead inspector Patricia Webb found the playrooms were suitable for children of all ages. She said they promoted independence and engaged children in purposeful play.

She found that the planning of lessons was based on children's interests and progress.

However, the monitoring and assessment of the youngsters was not precise enough, she added.

£1.8bn available to councils is cut in their spending power

COUNCILS in the West Midlands will have £1.8 billion to spend on services from April next year, the government has confirmed.

Report by Daniel Wainwright

But they face a cut of between 1.2 per cent and 2.2 per cent of their "spending power" – the total income they have from the government and council tax.

It leaves councils in Staffordshire with less than £2,000 to spend per home and areas of the Black Country with between £2,118 and £2,710. There will be a ban on raising council tax above two per cent without a referendum.

Town halls are being offered the equivalent of a one per cent rise to keep council tax as it is now. Secretary of state for local government, Eric Pickles said they had a "moral duty" to freeze council tax.

The grants take into account changes in business rates. Councils collect taxes from businesses and send the money to central government. Poorer areas like the Black Country get more back from the central pot.

Sweeping changes to the NHS will see councils take over public health duties next year and it has not yet been revealed how much they will get.

Councillor Andrew Johnson, Labour finance chief at Wolverhampton City Council, said: "It is virtually impossible to set the budget without major cuts.The two per cent cap on council tax rises puts us in a difficult position because even if we accept the grant to freeze it, we are still worse off next year."

In the House of Commons yesterday Mr Pickles said: "All councils have a moral duty to freeze council tax.

"We have set the referendum threshold at two per cent. This is democracy in action. If you want to hike the taxes, put it to the people."

What councils can spend next year

Council	Budget	Amount to spend per home
Dudley	£271.6m	£2,017
Sandwell	**£334.4m**	**£2,599**
Walsall	£282.1m	£2,534
Wolverhampton	**£276.5m**	**£2,610**
Staffordshire	£536.7m	£1,468
Cannock Chase	**£13.5m**	**£323**
Lichfield	£11m	£255
South Staffs	**£9.8m**	**£213**
Stafford	£13.9m	£246
Wyre Forest	**£14m**	**£312**
Fire authorities		
West Midlands Fire	£113.8m	£101
Staffordshire Fire	**£46m**	**£96**

Opportunities for local firms at new centre

SANDWELL companies are being urged to snap up business opportunities created by the £11 million leisure complex and swimming pool to be built in West Bromwich.

The complex in Bromford Lane will have a 25m pool with a learner pool, a sauna and steamroom, a four-court sports hall, fitness suite, dance studios/activity rooms, a children's adventure play centre and a cafe.

The contract has been awarded to DC Leisure, which has appointed Dutch construction firm Pellikaan as main contractor, and bosses want to meet suppliers of site security, cleaning companies, skips and equipment hire. A meeting will take place on January 10 from 6.45am to 9am at Sandwell Council House, Freeth Street, in Oldbury.

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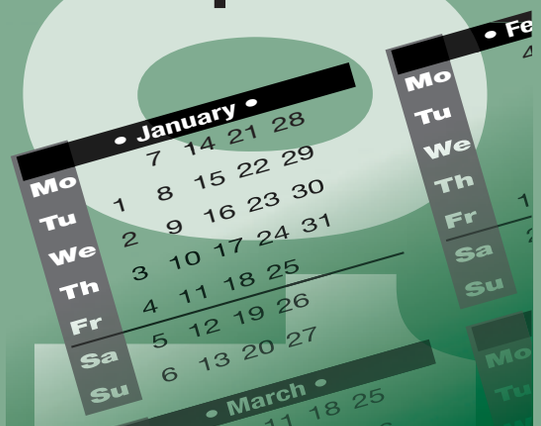

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NEWS

Schools should run on business hours – boss

MORE schools need to be run in tandem with business hours to prepare students for the world of work, the Smethwick industrialist overseeing new investment to the Black Country has said.

Stewart Towe, chairman of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership wants to see a new wave of university technical colleges.

The multi-million pound schools run eight-week terms with the school day starting at 8.30am and finishing at 5pm.

It came as the LEP finalises its bid for a City Deal which it has to submit by January 15. The deal would give it more control over millions of pounds of government funds to create jobs and invest in new infrastructure.

The LEP board is made up of the four council leaders and five business people.

Mr Towe, who runs the metal company the Hadley group, said: "The development of university technical colleges in the Black Country is a really important aspect of beefing up our skills in relation to education. They are run along different lines with eight-week terms and 8.30am to 5pm days.

"Employers like Jaguar Land Rover will want two years experience of work as well the skills.

"So we need businesses prepared to train people and willing to see them move on to something else. We need to create the right sort of jobs but make sure that we keep people in the area."

The £9.5 million Black Country University Technical College opened on the site of the former Sneyd Community School, Walsall 2011.

Are you game to help out?

Library customer services advisor Jen Alder appeals for gaming volunteers

VOLUNTEERS are being sought to run gaming sessions at a library in the Sandwell. Smethwick Library holds Xbox sessions once a week and is looking for young people who can spare one hour a week.

Sirena Cresswell, library supervisor, said: "We run teenage gaming session one evening every week after school.

"The Xbox sessions used to be funded by the Big Lottery but funding has run out. We wanted young volunteers but we have had problems getting two volunteers that could do it so we are trying to recruit them.

"We try to do family gaming session every half term or holidays, we also have teenage film club and a family club."

Volunteers would need to be aged at least 15 and upwards and be able to commit to around an hour once a week. Anyone interested can visit the High Street library.

Homes back with council

HOUSING is under Sandwell Council control as it took back responsibility for the borough's 29,000 homes. Council homes had been run at "arm's length" by Sandwell Homes under an agreement due to end in September 2014. The council aims to invest almost £500 million to improve homes over the next decade.

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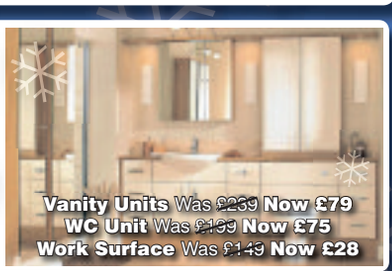

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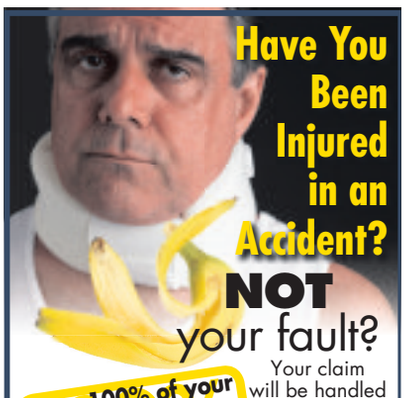

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NEWS

New line up of celebrities to help live the good life

YOU may still be suffering winter blues or a festive hangover but all keen gardeners know this is now a time to get things started and look ahead to the new growing season.

With this in mind The Edible Garden Show, the UK's award-winning national 'Grow-Your-Own' event, returns in March and is hoping to be bigger and better with a new line-up of celebrity experts.

The show harvests a huge crop of top exhibitors and brings inspirational celebrity chefs and gardeners together under one roof.

Chef Rachel Green will get taste buds tingling with her flamboyant cookery demonstrations, while TV botanist James Wong, BBC Gardeners' World presenter Alys Fowler, Gardeners' Question Time panellist Bob Flowerdew and the event's resident grow-your-own guru Paul Peacock will share their passion of growing and eating home-crops. Alys Fowler and Bob Flowerdew are newly on board for the 2013 show which takes place at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire on 15-17 March 2013.

Favourite - TV botanist James Wong

TV presenter, author and avid gardener Alys will talk of her love of organic food, allotments and money-saving ideas for thrifty growers.

Alys said: "I am excited and delighted to be part of a show that shares my passion for self-sufficiency and organic home-grown produce.

"I've been impressed by the way it brings together, under one roof, everything grow-your-own novices need to kick-start their healthy new lifestyles. And it doesn't have to be expensive. I can't wait to give growers an insight into how to become thrifty gardeners."

Married and living in Birmingham, Alys has an allotment and an urban back garden with two chickens, plenty of veg and enjoys foraging for food and composting.

Anecdotes

Another new celebrity set to share his tips and anecdotes with audiences at the 2013 show is author, gardener, speaker and BBC Gardeners' Question Time panellist Bob Flowerdew.

As the UK's foremost authority on productive gardening, the award-winning personality will entertain and enlighten visitors, sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm for fruits, vegetables, organic methods and scented plants.

Bob said: "I'm passionate about fruit and veg and really want to inspire other people to grow their own. I think it's a great show. As our gardens are becoming smaller and smaller, I think more and more people will choose plants for their edible virtues.

"In a few years I'm sure we'll have roses with more juicy hips and more fuchsias selected for tastier sweeter fruits — they make a very good jelly. I'm sure a purely ornamental garden will be seen as an extravagant foible as edible gardens become more popular."

Newcomer – Alys Fowler

Following on from his success at the show in 2011 and 2012, BBC TV's award-winning presenter and botanist James Wong will be in the Experts Theatre urging visitors to break free of the grow your own "time-warp" and discover incredible edibles far more exciting than anything you would ever think could be grown on our blustery North Atlantic island.

Offering a light-hearted, dynamic and innovative alternative to conventional spuds and sprouts, James is on a mission to reveal the 99 per cent of weird and wonderful flavours that Brits are missing out on.

He says: "From Szechuan peppers and edible fuchsia berries, to tiny cucamelons and even home grown green tea, up to 3,000 edible crops can be grown extremely easily in the UK climate. Growing your own can be so much more cutting edge than you might think." Fans of Radio 4's The Archers will get a slice of Ambridge life with the Archers Addicts stand where they can meet actors Trevor Harrison who plays Eddie Grund' and Hedli Niklaus aka Kathy Perks, pick up a few Archers goodies and get them signed!

Hedli who also runs Archers Addicts – the official fan club for The Archers – said: "We love coming to shows like this because it puts us in touch with real life Ambridge, and it's a great opportunity to meet our listeners and hear their stories – every bit as interesting as ours."

Scheduled for the beginning of the growing season, The Edible Garden Show is bursting with new ideas, advice and features and has something for all the family from bees, chickens, goats and pigs to plants, seeds, compost, fruit presses, raised beds, tools and gadgets to making growing your own easier.

Show-goers will get a buzz with demonstrations from expert beekeepers on collecting and processing honey and top tips on how to keep the hive healthy, flourishing and free from disease.

Delightful

The British Pig Association is set to showcase native breeds of pigs and entertain families with daily ring demonstrations.

Prospective pig owners can gain invaluable insight into how to keep and breed these delightful animals. For the children, the BPA's Junior Pig Club last year staged their 'Pig Olympics' and it is hoped the fun spectacle will return.

Poultry vet Victoria Roberts will be on hand to share her hen-rearing tips. Victoria, whose passion and talent for rearing poultry began when she was only four, will bring along some of her pure breeds to demonstrate how to handle the birds and check for weight-loss and disease.

Tickets cost £15 (£12 if booked in advance) with concessions for children and seniors. For more show information or to buy tickets visit: www.theediblegardenshow.co.uk or telephone 0844 338 8001.

Above: Flamboyant chef – Rachel Green

Left: enthusiastic gardening expert – Bob Flowerdew

Below: Poultry expert – Victoria Roberts

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** The "from" price and price bands vary for each show – see brochure for details. Single room supplements apply.*

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Computers – Beginners Internet	Thursday	7pm – 9pm	Belly Dance – Level 1 & 2	Friday	7.30pm – 9pm
MUSIC			ARTS & CRAFTS		
Guitar – Follow On	Wednesday	7pm – 9pm	Fashion Sewing	Monday	7pm – 9pm
Guitar - Beginners	Thursday	6pm – 7pm	Art – How to Draw and Paint	Monday	10am – 12pm
Guitar – Follow On	Thursday	7pm – 9pm	Art – How to Draw and Paint	Tuesday	7pm – 9pm
LANGUAGES			Art – Modern Art Techniques	Thursday	7pm – 9pm
Sign Language – Level 1 Qualification	Monday	7pm – 9pm	Cake Decorating & Sugar Craft Intermediate	Tuesday	7pm – 9pm
Sign Language – Level 2 Qualification	Saturday	9am - 12pm	Cake Decorating & Sugar Craft Beginners	Thursday	7pm – 9pm
Sign Language – Introduction	Monday	7pm – 9pm	Soft Furnishing	Thursday	7pm – 9pm
Deaf Awareness – Certificate	Saturday	9am – 12pm	Jewellery Making – Follow On	Tuesday	7pm – 9pm
Languages – French - Level 1	Thursday	7pm – 9pm	Jewellery Making - Beginners	Wednesday	7pm – 9pm
Languages – Spanish Beginners level 1	Monday	7pm – 9pm	Flower Arranging - Beginners	Monday	7pm – 9pm
Languages – Spanish Beginners level 2	Tuesday	7pm – 9pm	Flower Arranging- Intermediate	Wednesday	7pm – 9pm
WRITING			Stained Glass Making	Thursday	7pm – 9pm
Creative Writing	Thursday	7pm – 9pm	Black Country Crafts	Wednesday	7pm – 9pm
MUSIC			BUSINESS & SOCIAL		
Guitar – Follow On	Wednesday	7pm – 9pm	Book Keeping - Introduction	Monday	7pm – 9pm
Guitar - Beginners	Thursday	6pm – 7pm	Minimising Stress and Anxiety	Monday	7pm – 9pm
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The Public lines up a season of laughs

A STAR-STUDDED comedy programme packed with some of the finest established and upcoming comics on the circuit is coming to The Public arts centre, West Bromwich.

Highlights include a new show from award-winning comedian and Guardian columnist, Shazia Mirza on February 15, and hilarious stand up from Lucy Porter with her new feel-good show, People Person, on April 17.

Robin Ince takes a comic look at some his favourite scientists on May 18, and Clare Summerskill brings her show to the venue on March 8.

On February 1, The Public will also see some of the Midlands' finest comics battle it out for a £100 prize with #HashTagFunny. Ten up-and-coming stars will take to the stage, and members of the audience can join the banter using the show's twitter tag.

Linda Saunders, managing director of The Public said: "We're delighted to bring some of the finest names on the comedy circuit to West Bromwich."

For the full programme visit www.thepublic.com

The West End coming to West Midlands theatres

THIS is the year that the West End comes to the West Midlands with several of the most popular stage shows of recent decades coming to theatres in the region during 2013.

by Leon Burakowski

Birmingham Hippodrome leads the way with a trio of blockbusters for the spring, summer and autumn – Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Phantom of the Opera, Disney's The Lion King and the National Theatre's acclaimed production of War Horse.

Hippodrome chief executive Stuart Griffiths said: "Following a huge programme of refurbishment and the complete replacement of our stage, we now look forward to what promises to be the busiest year in our history with three of the biggest theatrical successes of recent times."

Impresario Cameron Mackintosh's new touring production of The Phantom of the Opera, with Earl Carpenter as the romantic masked anti-hero, is at the theatre from March 13 to May 14.

Musical blockbuster, The Lion King, brings its cast of more than 50 performers from more than 17 countries when the story of Simba is staged from June 29 to September 28.

Hugely popular play War Horse, based on Michael Morpurgo's First World War-set novel, comes complete with its amazing life-sized puppet horses to the Hurst Street venue from October 17 to November 9.

Wolverhampton Grand Theatre also has an impressive line-up for the new year. Highlights include a revival of Lloyd Webber's spectacular feline musical Cats, including the classic song Memory, from March 19 to 30, and Ghost The Musical from June 3 to 15.

One of the biggest and brashest shows of the year at the New Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham will be Aussie drag musical Priscilla Queen of the Desert, with Jason Donovan getting back into his high heels to revisit his West End starring role from March 18 to 30.

Andile Gumbi as Simba in the London version of Disney's The Liong King, the show with music by Elton John is coming to Birmingham *Photo by Johan Persson*

Earl Carpenter as The Phantom and Katie Hall as Christine in The Phantom of the Opera UK Tour, coming to Birmingham this spring *Photo by Alistair Muir*

Brian is king of panto land

Robinson Crusoe & the Caribbean Pirates, Birmingham Hippodrome

BRIAN Conley's early exit from I'm A Celebrity meant he couldn't become King of the Jungle, but he's become King of Panto in Birmingham instead.

Singer, hoofer and comedian Conley brings enormous energy to a swashbuckling pantomime that, with a car flying over the audience and a roaring sea monster, must be one of the most spectacular in the UK.

Even suffering a cold, Conley lit up the theatre with his manic mirth and unpredictable antics. After a video prologue set in Brum, Conley started the show with a sight gag that had the audience howling with laughter. He remained in top gear throughout director Michael Harrison's laugh-a-minute production.

There was lots of slapstick. Perky Kathryn Rooney, as pretty Polly, went beyond the call of panto duty when Conley's singing whilst munching an apple saw her pebble-dashed in macerated fruit.

Andrew Ryan was a dame to remember in a dozen different deranged costumes and Lesley Joseph had lots of good lines as the glamorous Enchantress of the Ocean, though she talked rather than sang her songs.

Conley's treasure island antics continue until January 27. **LB**

What's On!

SATURDAY'S TV 5.01.13

Listings supplied by Press Association

CHOICE

Richard Hammond

Richard Hammond's Secret Service
BBC1, 6.30pm
Wipeout may be no more, but clearly the Beeb love having Richard Hammond as the face of teatime BBC1. So this week we welcome the Top Gear veteran for a new series which exploits the Candid Camera format. The news about this series broke last May, so "Hamster" fans have had a long wait to see the finished product. It sees him being hired by members of the public to play pranks on their family and friends. A team of actors and comedians dubbed his "secret service" will be on hand to ensure those hilarious japes have us clutching our sides.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** Baking Made Easy. (R) **12.00** BBC News; Regional News; Weather. **12.15** Football Focus. **1.00** Live Athletics: Great Edinburgh Cross Country. **2.30** Live Darts: BDO World Championships. **4.30** Final Score. **5.10** BBC News; Regional News; Weather. **5.30** Celebrity Mastermind.

6.00 Animal Antics. New series. Funny clips from the animal kingdom, presented by Tim Brooke-Taylor.

6.30 Richard Hammond's Secret Service. New series. Hidden-camera show.

7.10 Britain's Brightest. New series. Clare Balding hosts this search to find Britain's most intelligent individual, in which 24 people complete a series of challenges before one is crowned champion.

8.25 The National Lottery: In It to Win It. New series. Dale Winton presents the quiz in which five contestants pit their wits to scoop a big cash prize. Includes the National Lottery draws with Scott Mills.

9.15 Casualty. Four student nurses are thrown in at the deep end on their opening day working in the ED when they are called upon to treat casualties who have been injured in a coach crash.

10.05 Mrs Brown's Boys. Agnes falls under a hypnotist's spell. (R)

10.35 BBC News; Weather; National Lottery Update.

10.55 Film: Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End. (2007) Fantasy adventure sequel, with Johnny Depp.

1.30 Weatherview. **1.35** BBC News.

BBC2

6.50 Film: Sylvia Scarlett. (1935) **8.15 Film:** The Little Minister. (1934) **10.00** A History of Britain by Simon Schama. (R) **11.00** Meet the Ancestors. (R) **11.30** Map Man. (R) **12.00** Indian Food Made Easy. (R) **12.30** Talking Pictures. **1.15 Film:** Of Human Bondage. (1934) **2.35** EastEnders. (R) **4.00** Great British Food Revival. **4.30** Live Darts: BDO World Championships. **5.30** The Choir: A Year with the Military Wives. (R)

6.30 Flog It! Mark Stacey and Kate Bliss examine collectibles in St Albans, Hertfordshire, and presenter Paul Martin discovers the origin of the city's name during a visit to the cathedral. (R)

7.30 Dad's Army. Mainwaring guards some PoWs. (R)

8.00 Stanley Baxter: The Many Faces Of. A profile of the Glaswegian entertainer, whose TV shows drew huge audiences in the 1970s and 80s. With contributions from Michael Grade, Barry Cryer, Bill Oddie and Gregor Fisher.

9.00 QI XL. Stephen Fry is joined by comedians Phill Jupitus, Rich Hall and Jimmy Carr, along with regular panellist Alan Davies on an extended version of the quiz with a difference. (R)

9.45 Film: Cemetery Junction. (2010) Premiere. A young man in 1970s Reading questions what he wants as he starts a new job and is reunited with an old girlfriend. Comedy drama, with Christian Cooke.

11.15 Darts: BDO World Championships. Action from the opening day at the Lakeside Country Club.

12.05 Darts Extra. **2.05** Close.

ITV1

6.00 CITV: Handy Manny. **6.25** The Hive. (R) **6.35** The Hive. (R) **6.40** Dino Dan. (R) **6.55** Dino Dan. (R) **7.05** Fleabag Monkeyface. (R) **7.15** Fleabag Monkeyface. (R) **7.30** Fleabag Monkeyface. (R) **7.40** Matt Hatter Chronicles. (R) **8.05** Ultimate Spider-Man. **8.30** Victorious. (R) **9.00** Jessie. **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** The Jeremy Kyle Show USA. **10.25** The Jeremy Kyle Show USA. **11.20** River Monsters. (R) **11.50** ITV News; Weather. **12.00** Live FA Cup Football. **3.00** Dancing on Ice Live Tour 2012. (R) **4.00** Regional Programme ; Weather.**4.15** ITV News; Weather. **4.30** Live FA Cup Football.

7.15 Splash! New series. Celebrity contest, in which five stars perform a dive in an Olympic-sized pool under the tuition of London 2012 medallist Tom Daley. Vernon Kay and Gabby Logan present.

8.45 Take Me Out. New series. A pilot from Ayrshire, a Liverpool abseiler, a London entrepreneur and a surfer from Bournemouth try to impress 30 single women. Paddy McGuinness presents.

9.45 The Jonathan Ross Show. New series. Jeremy Piven talks about his new drama Mr Selfridge, David Tennant discusses his role in Spies of Warsaw, and comedienne Sarah Millican is also in the studio.

10.45 ITV News; Weather.

11.00 FA Cup Football Highlights. Matt Smith presents action from the third-round matches, which included Barrow or Macclesfield Town v Cardiff City, Southampton v Chelsea and Peterborough United v Norwich City.

12.30 The Store. **2.30** Pushing Daisies. (R) **3.15** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.00 The Treacle People. (R) **6.10** The Hoobs. (R) **6.35** The Hoobs. (R) **7.00** International Volleyball. **8.00** The Morning Line. **9.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **9.30** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **10.00** Frasier. (R) **10.30** Frasier. (R) **11.00** Undercover Boss USA. (R) **12.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.55** The Simpsons. (R) **1.30** Channel 4 Racing. **4.00** Come Dine with Me. (R) **4.35** Come Dine with Me. (R) **5.05** Come Dine with Me. (R) **5.40** Come Dine with Me. (R)

6.10 Channel 4 News.

6.40 4thought.tv. Members of the public who have made New Year's resolutions and stuck to them talk about their commitment to changing their lives.

6.45 Is Our Weather Getting Worse? Investigating the UK's most severe weather events of the past decade, with the use of archive footage, expert insight and computer graphics. (R)

7.40 Film: The Day After Tomorrow. (2004) A climatologist races across America to rescue his son as freak weather conditions cause devastation around the world. Disaster thriller, starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Dennis Quaid.

10.00 Film: Inglourious Basterds. (2009) Jewish-American soldiers on a Nazi-killing spree in occupied France aid a resistance plot to assassinate Hitler. Tarantino's wartime adventure, with Brad Pitt and Christoph Waltz.

1.00 Film: Hard Eight. (1996) **2.40** Hollyoaks. **4.45** Smallville. (R) **5.25** Deal or No Deal. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **10.00** Power Rangers: Super Samurai. **10.35** Batman: The Brave and the Bold. **11.10** Inside Hollywood. **11.15** Celebrity Big Brother. (R) **12.15** The Gadget Show. (R) **1.15 Film:** Shattered Silence. (2012) **3.00 Film:** The Dam Busters. (1954) **5.30 Film:** Random Hearts. (1999) Drama, with Harrison Ford.

7.50 5 News Weekend.

7.55 NCIS. Gibbs discovers a link between the murder of a petty officer and the break-up of his team, leading him and new director Leon Vance to unravel the mystery. (R)

8.50 NCIS. A lieutenant apparently commits suicide by jumping from an aircraft carrier and Ziva and McGee are dispatched to inform the widow – but arrive to find that she has been murdered. (R)

9.45 Celebrity Big Brother. Highlights of the famous housemates' past 24 hours under the all-seeing eye of Big Brother, as they try to get used to living alongside one another.

10.45 50 Shocking Facts About Diet and Exercise. Countdown of weight-loss methods, with scientists, industry experts and exponents explaining the pros and cons of fad diets, "healthy" foods and extreme exercise regimens.

11.45 Forensic Files. A female killer leaves police few clues to work with. (R)

12.15 SuperCasino. **4.00** Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R) **4.25** Great Artists. (R) **4.50** Rough Guide To. (R) **5.05** Hana's Helpline. (R) **5.15** The Milkshake! Show. (R) **5.40** Thomas & Friends. (R) **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Three
7.00 Merlin **7.45** Doctor Who **8.35** Top Gear **9.30** Russell Howard's Good News **10.05 Film:** The Prestige (2006)

BBC Four
7.00 Lost Land of the Tiger **8.00** A History of Art in Three Colours **9.00** Borgen **11.00** The Richest Songs in the World

ITV2
3.35 Film: The Mighty Ducks (1992) **5.40 Film:** Peter Pan (2003) **7.50 Film:** Evan Almighty (2007) **9.45** Take Me Out – The Gossip **10.35** Fake Reaction **11.20 Film:** Couples Retreat (2009)

ITV3
3.00 Agatha Christie's Marple **5.00** Lewis **7.00** Doc Martin **9.00** Midsomer Murders **11.05 Film:** Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007)

ITV4
3.15 Film: The Way West (1967) **5.45 Film:** The Big Country (1958) **9.00 Film:** Hard Target (1993) Action thriller, starring Jean-Claude Van Damme. **11.00 Film:** GoodFellas (1990)

E4
2.30 Film: Charlotte's Web (2006) **4.30** How I Met Your Mother **5.30** The Big Bang Theory **7.30** How I Met Your Mother **8.00** Rules of Engagement **9.00 Film:** Role Models (2008) **11.00** The 50 Funniest Moments of 2012

Film4
3.10 Fantastic Mr Fox (2009) **4.55** Hairspray (2007) **7.15** Zoolander (2001) **9.00** Knowing (2009) An astrophysicist decodes a page of numbers revealing the dates of a series of disasters and tries to prevent them happening. Mystery thriller, starring Nicolas Cage and Rose Byrne. **11.20** The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning (2006)

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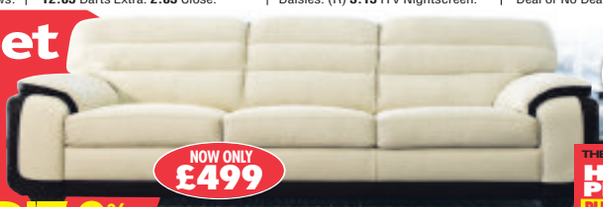
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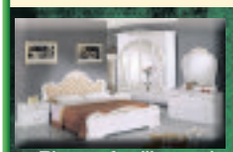
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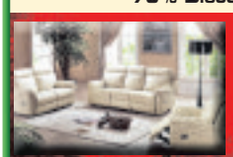
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SUNDAY'S TV 6.01.13

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CHOICE

Jeremy Piven

Mr Selfridge
ITV1, 9pm
Created by multi-award-winning writer Andrew Davies (he penned famous adaptations of Pride and Prejudice, Bleak House and Little Dorrit) and set in 1909, this new, fact-based drama stars Jeremy Piven as Harry Selfridge, a visionary American entrepreneur who, during a trip to London, decided that the British shopping experience needed sprucing up. So he invested £400,000 (a whopping amount of cash back then) in creating the Oxford Street department store that now carries his name. But, as we see here, getting his vision off the ground wasn't always easy.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** The Big Questions. **11.00** Helicopter Heroes. (R) **11.30** Bargain Hunt. (R) **12.30** BBC News; Weather. **12.40** Countryfile. (R) **1.35** Escape to the Country. (R) **2.35 Film:** Old Dogs. (2009) **4.00** Britain's Favourite Supermarket Foods. (R) **5.00** Songs of Praise. **5.35** Africa.

6.35 **BBC News**; Regional News; Weather.

7.00 **Countryfile.** Adam Henson presents a selection of past stories featuring horses and dogs, animals that are integral to rural life, and invites some of the most charming breeds on to his farm. Including Weather for the Week Ahead.

8.00 **Antiques Roadshow.** Fiona Bruce and the team travel to Stowe House in Buckinghamshire, where items include a 16th-century print and evidence of one of the earliest Beatles concerts. Red button viewers can play along by guessing the valuations.

9.00 **Ripper Street.** A teenage orphan is suspected of beating a toy-maker to death, bringing Reid and Drake face to face with a child gang and its brutal master. Joseph Gilgun (Misfits) guest stars.

10.00 **BBC News;** Regional News; Weather.

10.25 **Film: Bruce Almighty.** (2003) Comedy, starring Jim Carrey and Morgan Freeman.

12.00 The Sky at Night. **12.20** The Celebrity Apprentice USA. **1.40** Weatherview. **1.45** Sign Zone: Miniature Britain. (R) **2.45** Holby City. (R) **3.45** MasterChef: The Professionals. (R) **4.15** You've Been Scammed. (R) **4.45** BBC News.

BBC2

6.00 Film: They Flew Alone. (1942) **7.40 Film:** Yellow Canary. (1943) **9.15** A to Z of TV Gardening. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.30** EastEnders. (R) **12.55** Live Darts: BDO World Championships. **4.45** Coast. (R) **5.30** Flog It! The team visits Darlington, Co Durham. (R)

6.30 **Blackpool: Big Night Out.** Documentary looking at the Lancashire seaside resort through the eyes of acts who have performed there, and recalling its heyday as a town at the heart of British entertainment. (R)

7.30 **Fawlty Towers.** Manuel's pet rat escapes just as a health inspector is about to visit, sending Basil on a mad dash to find it before disaster ensues. Last in the series. (R)

8.00 **Neil Armstrong – First Man on the Moon.** Close family and friends tell the story of the commander of the historic Apollo 11 lunar mission in July 1969 and reveal how he coped with the subsequent fame. (R)

9.00 **Tankies: Tank Heroes of WWII.**

10.00 **Speed Dreams: The Fastest Place on Earth.**

11.00 **Darts: BDO World Championships.** Colin Murray presents action from the second day at the Lakeside Country Club in Frimley Green, featuring first-round matches.

11.50 **Darts Extra.** The BDO World Championships. Extended highlights of the first-round matches on the second day at the Lakeside Country Club in Frimley Green, played over the best of five sets.

1.50 BBC News.

ITV1

6.00 CITV: Handy Manny. **6.25** The Hive. (R) **6.35** The Hive. (R) **6.40** Dino Dan. (R) **6.55** Dino Dan. (R) **7.05** Fleabag Monkeyface. (R) **7.15** Fleabag Monkeyface. (R) **7.30** Fleabag Monkeyface. (R) **7.40** Matt Hatter Chronicles. (R) **8.05** Rated A for Awesome. **8.15** Rated A for Awesome. **8.30** Big Time Rush. **9.00** The Aquabats Super Show. **9.25** FA Cup Football Highlights. (R) **10.40** Dinner Date. (R) **11.45** May the Best House Win. (R) **12.45** Rosemary & Thyme. (R) **1.45** ITV News; Weather. **1.55 Film:** Columbo: Short Fuse. (1972) **3.30** The FA Cup Draw. **3.45** Midsomer Murders. (R) **5.45** Regional Programme ; Weather.

6.00 **ITV News;** Weather.

6.15 **Dancing on Ice.** New series. Jason Gardiner returns on a new-look judging panel as the first group of skaters battles to stay in the competition. Phillip Schofield and Christine Bleakley present. The results are at 8.30pm.

7.45 **All Star Family Fortunes.** New series. Soap stars Mikey North and Matthew Wolfenden take part.

8.30 **Dancing on Ice: The Skate Off.** New series. The two least popular celebrities have to skate again.

9.00 **Mr Selfridge.** New series. US retail magnate Harry Gordon Selfridge arrives in London in 1908 planning to open the world's finest department store.

10.30 **ITV News;** Weather.

10.45 **FA Cup Football Highlights.** Swansea City v Arsenal and Mansfield Town v Liverpool.

11.45 **Royal Babies.** (R)

12.40 The Store. **2.40** Pushing Daisies. (R) **3.25** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.20 The Treacle People. (R) **6.30 Film:** Arctic Tale. (2007) **7.55** Will & Grace. (R) **8.25** Frasier. (R) **8.55** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **1.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **1.30** The Simpsons. (R) **2.00** The Simpsons. (R) **2.30 Film:** Clueless. (1995) **4.25** Deal or No Deal. **5.25** Time Team.

6.25 **Channel 4 News.**

6.55 **4thought.tv.** Members of the public who have made New Year's resolutions and stuck to them talk about their commitment to changing their lives.

7.00 **Come Dine with Me.** Dinner party challenge from Wrexham. Taking part are financial adviser Joey Perez, keep-fit enthusiast Jacki De Sanders, sci-fi fan Tom Evans and hotel inspector Lisa Groom.

8.00 **The Hotel.** Manager Mark tries to appeal to upmarket guests and seeks the help of a former AA chief hotel inspector – who books in undercover and is unimpressed by what he finds.

9.00 **Film: The Iron Lady.** (2011) Premiere. The elderly Margaret Thatcher looks back on her controversial political career as she faces up to the death of her husband. Biopic, with Meryl Streep and Jim Broadbent.

11.05 **Film: The Wedding Date.** (2005) Romantic comedy, with Debra Messing and Jack Davenport.

12.40 Film: Venus. (2006) **2.15** Jennifer Saunders: Laughing at the 90s. (R) **4.05** Smallville. (R) **4.45** Deal or No Deal. (R) **5.40** Baking Mad with Eric Lanlard. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Peppa Pig. **6.05** Roary the Racing Car. (R) **6.15** Fifi and the Flowertots. (R) **6.25** Bert and Ernie's Great Adventures. (R) **6.30** The Mr Men Show. (R) **6.40** Olive the Ostrich. (R) **6.50** Abby's Flying Fairy School. (R) **7.00** Roobarb and Custard Too. (R) **7.10** Bananas in Pyjamas. (R) **7.25** Animal Antics. (R) **7.35** Make Way for Noddy. (R) **7.45** City of Friends. (R) **8.00** Little Princess. (R) **8.05** The Adventures of Bottle Top Bill and His Best Friend Corky. (R) **8.20** Mio Mao. (R) **8.25** Angelina Ballerina. (R) **8.45** Rupert Bear. (R) **9.00** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **9.15** Toby's Travelling Circus. (R) **9.30** Roary the Racing Car. (R) **9.45** Jelly Jamm. **10.00** Power Rangers: Super Samurai. **10.35** Batman: The Brave and the Bold. **11.00** Inside Hollywood. (R) **11.05** Celebrity Big Brother. (R) **12.05** Once Upon a Time. (R) **1.00 Film:** Are We There Yet? (2005) **2.50 Film:** White Fang. (1991) **4.50 Film:** Stand By Me. (1986)

6.20 **5 News Weekend.**

6.25 **Film: X2.** (2003) Superhero adventure sequel, starring Hugh Jackman, Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellen, Alan Cumming and Halle Berry.

9.00 **Celebrity Big Brother.** The ups and downs of life in the BB house as friendships and alliances are made, battle lines are drawn and arguments erupt.

10.00 **Most Shocking Celebrity Moments 2012.** Countdown of the year's biggest showbiz stories. (R)

12.50 SuperCasino. **4.00** House Doctor. (R) **4.50** Rough Guide To. (R) **5.00** Hana's Helpline. (R) **5.15** The Milkshake! Show. (R) **5.35** Thomas & Friends. (R) **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Three
7.00 Great Movie Mistakes IV **9.00 Film:** Alice in Wonderland (2010) **10.40** Family Guy

BBC Four
7.00 Britain on Film: A Woman's Place **7.30** Britain on Film: Brits at Play **8.00** Timeshift: How to Write a Mills & Boon **9.00** Doris Day: Virgin Territory **10.00 Film:** I Am Love (2009) **11.55** Top of the Pops: The Story of 1978

ITV2
3.35 Take Me Out – The Gossip **4.20 Film:** King Kong (2005) **8.00** You've Been Framed! **9.00** The Magaluf Weekender **10.00 Film:** I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry (2007)

ITV3
3.55 Film: Watership Down (1978) **5.50** Murder, She Wrote **6.50** Agatha Christie's Poirot **9.00 Film:** Rain Man (1988) Drama, starring Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise. **11.45** Cracker

ITV4
3.45 Film: The Sea Shall Not Have Them (1955) **5.45 Film:** The Last Sunset (1961) **8.00** Premiership Rugby Union **9.00 Film:** The Gauntlet (1977) **11.15 Film:** Village of the Damned (1995)

E4
3.10 Made in Chelsea End of Season Party **4.15 Film:** Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel (2009) **6.00** Rules of Engagement **7.00** The Big Bang Theory **8.00 Film:** Cheaper By the Dozen 2 (2005) **10.00** The 50 Funniest Moments of 2012

Film4
2.50 The Golden Child (1986) **4.45** The Golden Compass (2007) **6.55** Brewster's Millions (1985) **9.00** Predators (2010) Sci-fi thriller sequel, with Adrien Brody. **11.10** Thank You for Smoking (2005)

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What's On!

Film Choices

MONDAY
The Perfect Teacher, Channel 5, 3.10pm
A spoiled, selfish teenager becomes infatuated with her teacher. She befriends his daughter as a way of worming her way into the family and sets about manipulating every aspect of his life, including driving away his girlfriend. As her mind games continue, her obsession leads her to murder. Thriller, starring Megan Park and David Charvet. (2010)

TUESDAY
Mickey Blue Eyes, ITV1, 10.35pm
A strait-laced Englishman falls for a New York mobster's daughter, who wants to escape her family's criminal connections. However, try as he may, he realises there is virtually no way to avoid being drawn into the family's illegal shenanigans. Romantic comedy, starring Hugh Grant, Jeanne Tripplehorn, James Caan and Burt Young. (1999)

The Rebound, BBC1, 11.25pm
A New York mother starts a new life in suburbia after leaving her unfaithful husband. She befriends a younger man who is still getting over being abandoned by his wife. Romance soon blossoms, but neither is sure if they are just trying to recover from their recent failed relationships. Romantic comedy, with Catherine Zeta-Jones and Justin Bartha. (2009)

The Village, Friday, BBC1, 11.25pm

WEDNESDAY
When a Stranger Calls, Channel 5, 11.30pm
A teenager babysitting for a family living in a remote lakeside house is terrorised by mysterious threatening phone calls. She soon discovers the caller is ringing from inside the house and realises her and the children's lives are in danger. Horror, with Camilla Belle, Katie Cassidy and Tessa Thompson. (2006)

THURSDAY
Vivacious Lady, BBC2, 8.50am
A professor falls in love with a brash nightclub singer while on a trip to New York, and impulsively marries her. However, he is afraid his conservative family will not approve of his new wife, so tries to keep the relationship a secret from them. Romantic comedy, with Ginger Rogers and James Stewart. (1938)

FRIDAY
The Village, BBC1, 11.25pm
The peaceful rustic existence of villagers living a seemingly idyllic life in a remote 19th-century settlement comes under threat when an age-old truce with the creatures of the forest is broken by a headstrong young man. M Night Shyamalan's horror thriller, starring Joaquin Phoenix and Bryce Dallas Howard. (2004)

Pick of the Week

Dynamic duo's series is out of this world

If you've ever wondered how the galaxy began, then allow us to enlighten you.

Our whole universe was in a hot dense state, then nearly 14 billion years ago expansion started. Wait...

Okay, we admit it. Those are the lyrics to The Big Bang Theory, but if you want to know more about life, the universe and everything, then Dara O Briain and Brian Cox have just the show for you.

Since 2011, their week-long strand Stargazing Live has become an annual fixture in January, a time when the other terrestrial channels seem obsessed with shows about diets and alleged celebrities co-habiting in a camera-strewn pre-fab.

They kick things off their exploration of the night skies with the search for evidence of life on Mars, and ask viewers for help to explore an uncharted area of the red planet's surface.

Plus, Liz Bonnin reports live from NASA mission control to find out the latest findings of the Curiosity Rover, and Mark Thompson offers tips on how to observe the moons of Jupiter.

The Mock the Week veteran and the much imitated professor might be an unlikely double act, but their mix of jargon and banter has proved to be a great way to enjoy a week of programming.

For decades of course The Sky At Night was the daddy of all astronomy shows, a BBC1 staple which was usually screened when most of us were tucked up in bed.

Hosted by the much-missed Patrick Moore, TSAN made history as the longest-running TV show hosted by the same presenter.

From 1957, the acclaimed Knight inspired millions, including Queen guitarist Brian May, and Messrs O Briain and Cox.

Alas, astronomy series on other channels is rarely even an issue these days.

Those with a long memory may recall Heavens Above, a short-lived kids' ITV show from the 1980s in which Dr Heather Couper proved that reaching for the stars (while most of us were in the gutter) was just as much fun as playing asteroids on their Atari game system.

After the plug was pulled on that show, commercial TV bosses backed away from the genre about as fast as Felix Baumgartner's sub-space freefall last year.

So thank heavens Brian made the universe sexy again with his assorted BBC shows, Wonders of the Universe and Wonders of the Solar System.

We have no idea what his pending series Wonders of Life will be like, but we imagine his take on natural history could give genre legend David Attenborough a run for his money.

Brian's star, if you'll excuse the pun, has been on the rise for years now, and it helps that he's such a good all rounder, whether fronting impressive strands such as this, or Radio 4's Infinite Monkey Cage, with Robin Ince.

It's little wonder Danny Boyle chose him as technical adviser for his sci-fi epic Sunshine a few years ago.

Coming back to Earth with a bump, here Brian and Dara shed more light on the universe, and if that's not enough astronomical entertainment for you, stay tuned for spin-off show Back to Earth, which is broadcast immediately afterwards.

Brian Cox and Dara O Briain host Stargazing Live, Tuesday, BBC2, 8pm

Best of the Rest

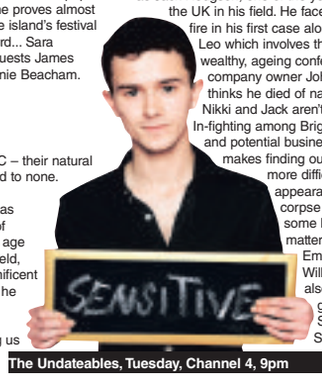
MONDAY
Miranda
BBC1, 9pm
The image Miranda projects is that of an overgrown child – but the latest episode sees her trying to prove she can behave as an adult. It's a task that is easier said than done... Miranda thinks that everyone will be convinced of her new, grown-up approach to life if she can successfully take care of a toddler and host a dinner party for eight people. Unfortunately, the youngster inside her can't resist a soft play area, so instead of encouraging the toddler to climb on the obstacles, she ends up stuck inside a kids' tunnel. And as for the dinner party... well, you can probably imagine the chaos that ensues there...

TUESDAY
The Undateables
Channel 4, 9pm
Being a small fish in the huge pool that is the dating game can be stressful enough at the best of times (men are from Mars and all that), but the individuals featured in this series have to contend with extra pressures – they're disabled. When the show first aired last year, many of us dared only look through squinted eyes at a programme that sounded as though it would poke fun at those less fortunate. What we were faced with, though, was a heartwarming series that highlighted that, everybody has the right to love and be loved. In this instalment, we meet 26-year-old Michael, whose autism means he struggles to hold down a conversation, let alone a date.

Death in Paradise
BBC1, 9pm
We're rather pleased to see this crime drama is back for a new run – not least because its depictions of hot weather should warm up our wintery nights. Ben Miller returns as policeman Richard Poole who, along with his team, must discover who has lethally wedged a machete into the back of former sugar plantation owner Roger Seymour. There is no shortage in suspects – Seymour doesn't seem to have been that popular a guy – but picking the right one proves almost impossible, especially when the island's festival of love begins to distract Richard... Sara Martins also stars, alongside guests James Cosmo, Tom Ward and Stephanie Beacham.

WEDNESDAY
Africa
BBC1, 9pm
You've got to hand it to the BBC – their natural history unit is absolutely second to none. That's thanks largely to David Attenborough's influence, both as presenter and former director of programmes. Now, even at the age of 86, he's still the best in his field, and he proves it with this magnificent series. In this second episode, he and the rest of the Africa team visit the rocky outcrops of the Serengeti, in Tanzania, to bring us some remarkable and striking images. They include a daring lizard risking its life to eat the flies from a lion's face, and footage of one of the most unusual birds extant – the four-foot-tall shoebill – demonstrating its nesting habits.

THURSDAY
Silent Witness
BBC1, 9pm
Another year, another series of Silent Witness. Stepping into Tom Ward's shoes is David Caves as Jack Hodgson, one of the youngest people in the UK in his field. He faces a baptism of fire in his first case alongside Nikki and Leo which involves the death of wealthy, ageing confectionary company owner John Briggs. DI Gold thinks he died of natural causes, but Nikki and Jack aren't so sure. In-fighting among Briggs' family, staff and potential business investors makes finding out whodunit all the more difficult – until the appearance of a new corpse helps to shed some light on the murky matter. Series regulars Emilia Fox and William Gaminara also star, alongside guests Sharon Small, Tim Pigott-Smith and Louis Emerick.



The Undateables, Tuesday, Channel 4, 9pm

FRIDAY
16 Kids and Counting
Channel 4, 9pm
Sue Radford is the matriarch of Britain's biggest family living under one roof, and having 15 of them already, she is now awaiting number 16. Eldest daughter Sophie, 18, could help out, but her first baby is due a month earlier. Given their ever-increasing numbers, a road trip to France could be seen as less of a family outing and more of an invasion, but that's on the cards as Sophie and boyfriend Joe come to terms with becoming first-time parents, while Sue and Noel get used to the idea of their new status as grandparents. Here cameras offer us a glimpse of the laughter, tears and general chaos at the Radfords.

The Graham Norton Show
BBC1, 10.35pm
Graham Norton is like a pair of old slippers. That's not to say he's got a faint whiff of something rather unpleasant and is well-worn; more that he's a comfortable fit and you just wouldn't be without him. Graham's audience knows exactly what it's going to get with him – clean, excitable fun that won't have telly bosses falling over themselves to reach for the 'censor' button. The fella simply has it. Whatever 'it' may be, there aren't many talk-show hosts like him. The man's got the gift of the gab, we'll give him that. And tonight, he's rubbing shoulders with the big guns, inviting only the coolest director in the world, Quentin Tarantino, on the show for a chinwag.

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Brain Gym

No.201

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.

26	11	23	1			3			12	11	24	3
	18			18	1	11	3	23		5		11
11	17	20	5	11		17		19	18	18	2	17
	20			13		20		22		1		11
	23	18	17	19	2	5	10	20		19	21	22
23				22		16				12		22
8	2	11	12	20	17		11	17	10	9	22	20
2		23				21		20				22
11	17	16		23	18	11	25	25	19	22	7	
26		17		15		23		2 U			17	
26	22	15	16	6		11		5 N	20	4	2	23
22		7		20	24	26	20	7			5	
20	12	20	17			15			7	2	14	20

1	14
2 U	15
3	16
4	17
5 N	18
6	19
7	20
8	21
9	22
10	23
11	24
12	25
13	26

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1 J	2 K	3 F	4 Q	5 N	6 B	7 X	8 V	9 T	10 O	11 G	12 I	13 M
14 W	15 P	16 E	17 C	18 D	19 R	20 H	21 L	22 A	23 Y	24 S	25 U	26 Z

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Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

Cryptic Clues:

Across

1. What the unpopular candidate will do? (5,2,4)
9. She features in all the Australian newspapers (3)
10. Share out a pint - poor arrangement! (9)
11. Decoys break the rules (5)
13. Everybody in the demonstration is superficial (7)
14. It's possibly nice to see (6)
16. A prop on the beach (6)
18. Guard gives a warning (4-3)
19. Total way to review the evidence (3,2)
20. It keeps stocking up (9)
21. Make mistakes out of terror (3)
22. Their skills are sinister (4-7)

Down

2. Catch a number up (3)
3. Comes closer in linear sketches (5)
4. Key member of the staff (6)
5. They're thrown from horses in rodeos (7)
6. Some space remaining for a liquor store (5,4)
7. Those put on it may expect firm offers in writing (7,4)
8. A world opens out for this Central Asian animal (4-7)
12. Turned up in France (9)
15. Nearest point in a cupboard (7)
17. Good grounds for holding sports (6)
19. There's a scrap when a communist is told to be quiet (5)
21. Are made a feature of (3)

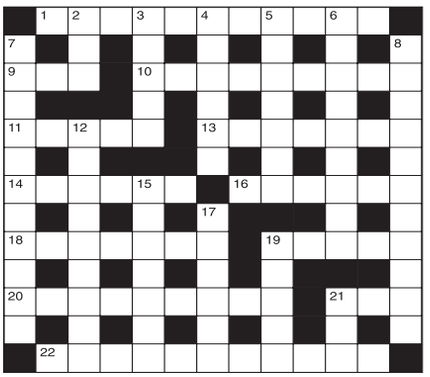
Quick Clues:

Across

1. Face (11)
9. Away (3)
10. Height (9)
11. Spiteful (5)
13. Steady worker (7)
14. Harvester (6)
16. In arrears (6)
18. Sterilised (7)
19. Charm (5)
20. Reckon (9)
21. Behind (3)
22. Frangibility (11)

Down

2. Dolt (3)
3. Very poor (5)
4. Not liable (6)
5. In fashion (1,2,4)
6. Innocent (9)
7. Agreement (11)
8. Disbelief (11)
12. Wayfarer (9)
15. Confide (7)
17. Bad writing (6)
19. Lustre (5)
21. Idiot (3)



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Orbs; 3 Smuggler; 9 Eagerly; 10 Forge; 11 Compare notes; 13 Slight; 15 Stay up; 17 Pull together; 20 Hails; 21 Clapper; 22 Cheering; 23 Tomb. Down: 1 Overcast; 2 Begum; 4 Mayhem; 5 Gift of the gab; 6 Larceny; 7 Roes; 8 Breathalyser; 12 Spare rib; 14 Inutile; 16 Toucan; 18 Hippo; 19 Chic. QUICK - Across: 1 Sell; 3 Maturity; 9 Affront; 10 Fatal; 11 Disapproving; 13 Recent; 15 Sudden; 17 Cream-cracker; 20 Ennui; 21 Aileron; 22 Intended; 23 Once. Down: 1 Slanders; 2 Lifts; 4 Attire; 5 Unfavourable; 6 Intoned; 7 Yell; 8 Compensation; 12 Entrance; 14 Coronet; 16 Scrape; 18 Koran; 19 Yeti.

Sudoku

Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

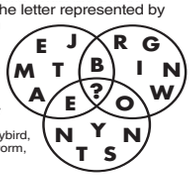
			4	8			9	
2	8			6	1			3
5								8
	1	9		4		7		
			2	7	6		5	
7						6	8	
9		3				8		5
	6		3	5			1	7
	5				2			

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

6	5	8	9	1	3	2	7	4
2	1	3	8	4	7	9	5	6
9	7	4	2	5	6	8	3	1
3	9	7	5	2	4	6	1	8
4	6	1	3	8	9	5	2	7
5	8	2	6	7	1	3	4	9
8	4	6	7	3	5	1	9	2
7	3	9	1	6	2	4	8	5
1	2	5	4	9	8	7	6	3

Circlegram

Replace the question mark with a letter so that the letters within each circle can be arranged to form words on a common theme. What are the three words, and the letter represented by the question mark?



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION: The letter represented by the question mark is L. Ladybird, Greenfly, Silkworm, all insects.

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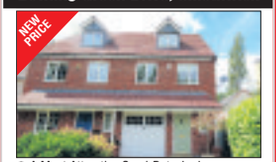

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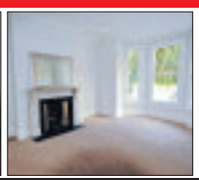

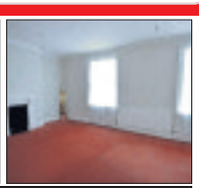

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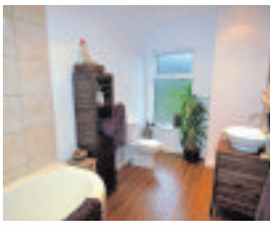

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Ideas to spare stylish makeover

A spare room needn't be a wasted space or a dumping ground for clutter. **Gabrielle Fagan** sources great buys and expert tips for creating a room fit for any seasonal visitor

THE kids might be running around the house in school holiday-induced excitement, and friends and relatives popping round with all the gossip – but chances are you'll hear nothing as you single-handedly fight your way through the clutter in the spare room.

Giving it a makeover so it's fit for guests is often the last-minute task of the season, with the rest of the family mysteriously melting away as soon as it's mentioned.

Unfortunately, all too often we haven't even got a clue what's accumulated in there and dread clearing it, according to a survey by Spaceslide, online sliding wardrobe systems and storage specialist.

"These rooms are usually a repository for things that no one can find a space for elsewhere, from seasonal clothes to sports kit and board games," says Jon Gough at Spaceslide, where shelving systems start from £83.40.

"Often, it's a room only used around five times a year for visitors so the clutter easily mounts unnoticed.

"Adequate storage, which maximises space, helps hugely whether it's wardrobes with sliding doors or open shelving.

Making the most of every inch of room, from under-bed storage to better use of room in an existing wardrobe, will all make it easy to organise possessions."

It's not too late to transform the spare room into a cosy sanctuary with the addition of new, attractive bedding and accessories, and a bit of decor TLC.

In the New Year you could take advantage of the sales and invest in kit which could significantly improve the room and render any more of those frenzied seasonal sort-outs unnecessary.

The Esprit office range is shown in white mid-sheen and nocino finishes with a fold-away bed

Follow our guide to bringing style to the spare room – with short-term and long-term solutions.

A comfortable bed is a vital ingredient for the spare room – guests who've slept properly will be much better company than those who haven't.

"The popularity of the fold-away bed rocketed in 2012 and is tipped to continue in 2013," says Jamie Dean, head of design at Betta Living, fitted furniture and storage specialists.

Their fold-away beds start from £1,494, and can be bought as part of a room design.

A bedroom with a well-dressed bed – think cuddly textures like wool, velvet and cashmere – will instantly turn a spare room into a welcoming and comforting retreat.

This time of year, many shops are well into the sales, and it's a great opportunity to bag bargain bedding.

Just don't get overwhelmed by sale fever and buy a luridly patterned duvet set simply because it's on offer – there's probably a reason why the store's got loads left.

It's always helpful if a spare room is more than just somewhere to sleep so that visitors will feel encouraged to retreat to it for a break or when the intimacy of the season is wearing a little thin.

If you have space in the bedroom, give over a corner for somewhere to sit and read, listen to music or make phone calls.

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Your essential guide to the world of motoring compiled by Motoring Editor Sharon Walters

Versatility and extra space puts the Splash out in front

By John Griffiths

WHO knows where car manufacturers come up with the names of their new models, but you can't help thinking Suzuki wanted British motorists to Splash out on one of their newly-updated models.

It's officially a mini-MPV, but it's a still a bit bigger than some of the other popular hatchbacks in the small car experts' line-up, and those of its rivals.

It goes to show that a few extra inches can make a big difference.

The revamped Splash doesn't take up any more room on the road, neither is it any more difficult to park, than most in the hatchback class. But it's taller, which means an elevated driving position for better visibility, better than average room for five passengers and a bit more luggage space. The latest Splash has new front and rear bumper styling, a new bonnet and grille design, and inside there's a new design of seat fabric and graphite colour scheme.

I drove the top-of-the-range SZ4 version powered by the lively 1.2 litre, 94PS petrol engine originally developed for the Splash's popular stablemate, the Swift. The list price is £12,000 while the entry level model is £9,325 – although at the time of writing Suzuki's 'VAT free' offer was putting them all in the bargain basement.

The Splash's big selling points are versatility and room compared to hatchback rivals, particularly when it comes to the most frequently used seats – the two in the front. The seating position is relatively high, with deep windows, which helps visibility and manoeuvring in tight spots.

It also occurred to me that it would be appreciated by a couple of elderly relatives, who find getting in and out of my own small hatchback a bit of a trial.

The three rear seats split and fold flat to create an impressive 573 litres of cargo space, plus a waterproof compartment under the load floor: ideal for a dog and your wellies without messing up the interior.

The Suzuki Splash, a spacious mini-MPV

I didn't get to drive the one litre, 68PS engine but the 1.2 (familiar from the Swift) is smooth and lively, taking you from a standstill to 60mph in 12 seconds yet capable of averaging a little over 55mpg. CO2 emissions are 118g/km, so at current rates that will cost you just £30 a year in VED (road tax).

There isn't a diesel option but to be frank with such economy figures and the extra 5p per litre or so you'd pay for fuel, that's hardly worth worrying about.

The Splash is light and easy to drive, and its height has an added advantage. It allowed the engineers a little more room for suspension components compared to smaller cars, resulting in a particularly smooth ride by class standards.

All Splash come with four airbags, CD tuner with MP3 player and steering wheel-mounted audio controls; a leather-trimmed steering wheel; remote central locking; front electric windows with driver's auto-down; electrically adjustable and heated door mirrors; height-adjustable front seats; tilt adjustable steering wheel and an information display.

The SZ3 and 4 versions also get air conditioning, while top of the range models have an Electronic Stability Programme); curtain shield airbags, 15in alloys, front foglamps, keyless entry and start with privacy glass for the rear side windows and tailgate.

BUMPER TO BUMPER

Model: Suzuki Splash SZ4 1.2
Engine: 1,2 litre dual VVT (variable valve timing) petrol engine driving the front wheels through a five-speed manual gearbox.
Performance: 0-60mph in 12 secs.
Economy: Urban 46.3mpg, country 62.8mpg, average 55.4mpg. CO2 emissions 118g/km.
Insurance group (1-50) 11.
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The Tourer was named best MPV at Practical Caravan's Towcar Awards

Tourer tows the line for quality

By Sharon Walters

First things first, I don't need a seven seater car and I don't need to be able to tow a decent weight . . . but if I did the Vauxhall Zafira Tourer would be up there among contenders.

This third-generation of the model hit our roads earlier this year and has continued its earlier success and built on it. Unlike some MPVs, it is full-size with plenty of space for seven, and also unlike other MPVs, it can actually tow a decent weight. In fact it was named this year's Best MPV at Practical Caravan magazines's Towcar Awards 2012.

The Practical Caravan awards, backed by What Car? magazine and The Camping and Caravanning Club, are based on a vigorous and thorough towcar assessment. Each car is tested by a panel of eight judges for its towing ability, buying and owning costs, drive quality when not towing and practicality.

"The Zafira Tourer really comes into its own when towing," said awards judge Nigel Donnelly, Haymarket Outdoor Leisure Group's editor-in-chief – digital. "At the legal limit and beyond the Zafira Tourer is a relaxing car to tow with. With plenty of power and torque, the 2.0-litre engine pulled car and caravan from 30-60mph in 14.1 seconds. Braking showed the shortest stopping distance in this class. The Zafira Tourer offers strong performance, good stability and space for seven."

"We're delighted Zafira Tourer has won the Best MPV title at the Towcar Awards 2012," said Peter Hope, Vauxhall's marketing director. "The Towcar of the Year awards are an industry standard and by far the most prestigious event in the caravanning calendar."

And while I didn't test its towing capabilities the 2.0 litre version I drove certainly felt it had the capability to hitch up the 'van' for a summer holiday and leave you feeling pretty safe behind the wheel with the kids piled in the back. But I did test some of Vauxhall's flexibility claims by trying out a number of the options Flex7 seating system. There are several including 'Lounge Seating' on key models. When you want seven up the two seats at the very back come up out of the floor and the middle bench seat is now a set of three separate seats which are also each capable of folding and splitting into any number of combinations. In addition the two outside seats slide backwards and inwards against the middle seat which folds to form two arm rests and gives plenty of space.

Reduced

Only downside to seven up is the reduced boot space. But if you want to turn it into a load lugger put all the seats down to reveal 1,860 litres of space – more than enough for a trip to collect flat-pack from Ikea or clear the shed out and head for the tip.

Staying on the inside materials are of a much better quality than the old model and the design means everyone gets a good view of outside from the light and airy cabin. This is made even better if you opt for a panoramic sunroof and the high-top windscreen

There's a choice of two petrol engines and three diesel. My car was the ecoflex with start/stop technology and I really could appreciate the difference in fuel consumption when chugging around town doing odd jobs and stopping off for shopping. Sitting at traffic lights just when they change at one of my regular routes can take some minutes and when the engine switches off it can make all the difference on your monthly fuel bill.

Drivewise it was comfortable and coped well with the potholes on the B roads on my way into work and it smoothly made its way along the M54.

Standard features across the four trim level range include: ESP, six airbags, air conditioning, CD/MP3 player and cruise control – not bad with prices starting at £21,010.

A good view outside is guaranteed due to the Zafira's high-top windscreen

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2. Do not arrange to collect a puppy from any other location than that of the breeder.
3. Ensure that you are given any KC documentation, if pedigree.
Whilst Midland News Association publications take great care to avoid publication of advertisements from Puppy Farmers we cannot accept any liability should readers purchase from this kind of establishment.

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(TEMPORARY ROAD CLOSURE) AND HALL STREET, OLDBURY
(TEMPORARY ONE-WAY OPERATION) ORDER 2013

1. NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Borough Council of Sandwell, following a fire at Alcohols Ltd, in the interests of health and safety in accordance with the provisions of Section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, and in not less than seven days from the date of this Notice, intends to make an Order, the effect of which will be to prohibit any vehicle from proceeding along the following roads in Oldbury:
- Crosswells Road (between the Level Crossing and Hall Street).
- Station Road (between the Level Crossing and Western Road).

The alternative route for vehicles will be via Western Road, Tat Bank Road, Vicarage Road, Crosswells Road and vice-versa.

Hall Street will also be closed for short periods as and when required in order to facilitate demolition works.

2. No vehicle shall be allowed to proceed in Hall Street, Oldbury other than in a northerly direction.

Southbound traffic will be diverted via Vicarage Street, Vicarage Road and Crosswells Road.

3. The Order will take effect on 14th January 2013, and is expected to continue for approximately 8 weeks or until the site has been made safe and the fire damaged structures have been demolished. The Order may continue in force for a period not exceeding 18 months, or until the works in connection with the Order have been completed, whichever is the sooner.
4. Any queries about the work or the road closures should be directed to Highway Services on 0845 359 7518.

DATED this 3rd day of January 2013
N SHARMA
Director of Legal and Governance Services
Sandwell Council House
Oldbury, West Midlands

HIGHWAYS AGENCY

**ROAD TRAFFIC REGULATION ACT 1984-SECTION 14(1)(A)
THE M5 MOTORWAY (FRANKLEY, WORCESTERSHIRE)
(TEMPORARY RESTRICTION OF TRAFFIC) ORDER 2013**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Secretary of State for Transport intends to make an Order on the M5 Motorway near Frankley in the County of Worcestershire to allow resurfacing and drainage works to be carried out.

The effect of the Order will be to impose a 50 miles per hour speed limit on the southbound carriageway of the M5 from a point 30 metres south of the centreline of Frankley Green Lane underbridge to the centreline of Malthouse Lane underbridge near Chadwich Manor.

Work is expected to start at 00.01 hours on Monday 21 January 2013 and continue for approximately 9 weeks. The Order will come into force on 14 January 2013.

Vehicles being used by the emergency services and special forces will be exempt from the speed limit.

For further information, please contact xxx on xxx xxx.

Mike Lloyd, A Higher Executive Officer in the Highways Agency.

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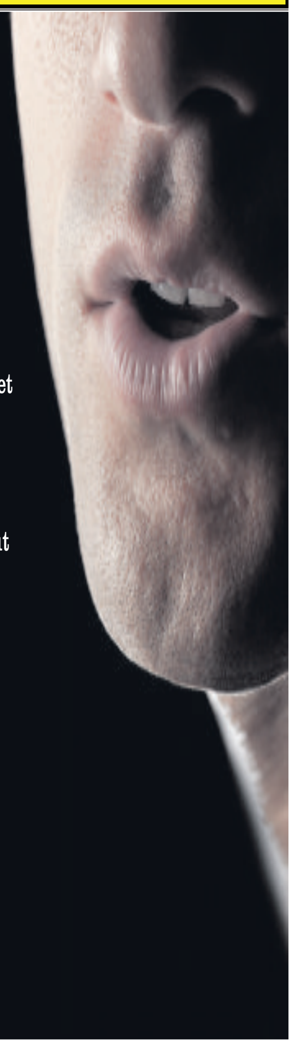

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LOOKING for love. Telford male, 46, shaved head, average build, likes walks, meals out, seeks female. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 397941**

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MALE 58, youthful, serene nature, understanding, loyal, honest, seeks similar mature female for everlasting relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 391833**

CD 70 plus seeking CD 70 plus for friendship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 393208**

MALE 34, attractive, 5ft 10ins, blue eyes, blond hair, seeks slim male for fun relationship. Any area, can travel. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 311892**

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A timely reminder that spirit still intact

Albion 2 Norwich 1

ALBION calmed their pre-Christmas nerves with a victory which ended a run of three Premier League defeats.

Frank words were exchanged on the pitch and in the dressing room during and after a win that was secured when Romelu Lukaku's brilliant 82nd-minute header completed a battling turnaround, ***writes Steve Madeley.***

Yet while boss Steve Clarke and his players accepted their performance in ending Norwich's fine unbeaten run had been less than sparkling, they also knew that victory was all-important to silence suggestions that their early-season bubble had burst.

And after the Baggies had found themselves 1-0 down to Robert Snodgrass's fine free-kick and staring at a fifth successive winless match, the comeback that began with Zoltan Gera's scrambled equaliser and ended with Lukaku's winner was a timely reminder that their fighting spirit remains intact.

Honest

After four matches without a win and more than five hours without a goal, Clarke's players knew the result of this match was infinitely more significant than the performance.

In an honest post-match debrief, the Scot praised his players' commitment and effort but challenged them to rediscover their poise and fluidity.

There are, however, several reasons for Clarke to be cheerful, most notably the continued fine form of centre-backs Jonas Olsson and Gareth McAuley and the impressive emergence of Goran Popov at left-back.

And the return of established No. 1 Ben Foster was a welcome sight despite an error that contributed to Snodgrass's opener.

Albion and Norwich traded half-chances before Peter Odemwingie fouled Snodgrass, who bent the resulting free-kick into the net off Foster's hand.

Albion got the break they needed two minutes before the break when keeper Mark Bunn could only palm an Olsson header against the woodwork and Gera bundled home the rebound for the equaliser.

And on 82 minutes, Lukaku thundered home a magnificent header from a fine Popov cross.

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Take heart for annual run

BLACK COUNTRY keep-fit fans are preparing to run for their hearts.

Action Heart's annual five-mile run takes place this year on Sunday, February 24.

The 23rd Heart Run gets under way at 9.30am, starting and finishing at Russells Hall Hospital in Dudley.

The event, supported by Dudley NHS Primary Care Trusts, is enjoyed by all types of people, from serious club runners to joggers and fun-runners.

Many might not tackle the event but for the training schedule provided by the organisers, which will appear in the Chronicle.

An application form is printed, left, or can be downloaded from www.actionheartrunning.com

Send a cheque, payable to Action Heart, with entry form and SAE for race number to: Action Heart, 5 Baird House, Dudley Innovation Centre, Pensnett Estate, Kingswinford, DY6 7YA.

Fee: £11 (registered running club members); £13 (non-club members). There is no entry on the day.

If you have not exercised for some time or are out of condition, see your doctor and get approval.

Training: Week One

Monday: 10 minutes (alternate one min jog/one min walk).
Tuesday: Rest.
Wednesday: Five minutes (two min jog/one min walk/two min jog).
Thursday: Rest.
Friday: Seven minutes (three min jog/one min walk/three min jog).
Saturday: Rest.
Sunday: 10 minutes (jog/walk).
Look out for week two next week.

Albion can get more ambitious for 2013

QPR 1 Albion 2

IT'S mission all-but accomplished, with half the season left, ***writes Steve Madeley.***

The 40-point mantra that governed ambition for the first half of Steve Clarke's debut campaign served well in the opening 19 games but the Baggies can aim higher.

After ending their winter wobble with a tense win against Norwich days earlier, Clarke's men followed it up with a first double of the season in an all-action Boxing Day contest at Loftus Road.

They withstood a late barrage as new QPR boss Harry Redknapp could feel aggrieved at the result.

Albion kitman Pat Frost filled out the teamsheet under instructions from a coach stranded on the M40.

Shaun Wright-Phillips skipped between two defenders and crossed as Jamie Mackie stole a yard on Goran Popov. The Rangers wideman headed wide.

Albion held their own in general play and went ahead on 29 minutes with Chris Brunt collecting Marc-Antoine Fortune's square pass and letting fly from 30 yards with a daisy-cutter to beat the diving Rob Green.

Threatened

Popov limped off with a hamstring pull and Gareth McAuley had to make a hurried, headed clearance-but, as half-time approached, Albion grew in confidence and were only threatened as Clint Hill headed off target.

On the stroke of half-time a jinking run by James Morrison helped him set up Zoltan Gera, who bent a shot just wide.

On 50 minutes Brunt's umpteenth dangerous corner saw Jamie Mackie head into the air and, as Green was challenged by Fortune, the QPR keeper fell over the line.

Furious home players screamed for a free-kick for Fortune's challenge but ref Chris Foy awarded the goal.

Lukaku had a chance after being played in by Mulumbu but Green partly redeemed himself by saving at the feet of the striker.

With 22 minutes left Djibril Cisse nipped between Albion's centre-backs to collect Stephane Mbia's neat through-ball and score.

Hill's goalbound header was blocked on the line by Mulumbu before Liam Ridgewell escaped what looked a blatant penalty as he blocked with his arm.

Own goal is a devil of a blow for Baggies

Manchester Utd 2 Albion 0

A YEAR of magical moments almost ended well for Albion at the 'Theatre of Dreams'.

Their travelling fans gloried in the second-half efforts of a patched-up Baggies team as Steve Clarke's battlers handed the Premier League leaders a real scare as 2012 drew to a close, ***writes Steve Madeley.***

Ultimately, a moment of misfortune for Gareth McAuley, with an own goal, and a flash of Robin van Persie brilliance ensured Manchester United kept their title charge on track with what would have looked, to those not present, like a routine victory.

The subdued, nervous, 72,000 United fans, who barely made a squeak as their side edged home, knew their latest success had not come easily.

Albion's performance before half-time was a touch anti-climactic in the wake of back-to-back victories that had restored the soaring optimism generated by their early-season surge.

Meekness

But, as the footballing curtain came down on the year of a lifetime for Baggies supporters, it was hardly a day for dwelling on the frustrating meekness of the first-half performance. It was a day for celebrating a fine second-half effort from an Albion side shorn of as many as seven potential starters.

It was a day for exalting in a potential breakthrough display by 19-year-old George Thorne and a very solid turn by understudy centre-back Gabriel Tamas.

Most of all, it was an occasion for Albion fans to reflect on a marvellous 12 months past and look ahead to a year in which – given the continuing struggles of their neighbours – they can realistically hope to see their club cement a place as West Midlands football's leading lights.

Despite a final scoreline that gave the impression of a workaday victory for United, there was still evidence of the huge strides made by Albion since 2012 began with a routine defeat at Tottenham.

Dejection for Albion's Gareth McAuley after scoring an own goal

Gabriel Tamas, right, tangles with Danny Welbeck

Despite a raft of changes that tested the Hawthorns squad to its limits for the middle fixture of a crowded festive programme, the Baggies underlined the increasing depth at the club by pushing United all the way until substitute Van Persie's wonderful goal killed off all hope in the dying seconds of the game.

Sir Alex Ferguson's nervous prowl on the touchline for much of the first half was a clear sign that the Baggies had their hosts worried.

At the heart of a spirited effort was Thorne, a talented teenager who finally announced his arrival on the first-team scene and will hope to capitalise on a solid Premier League foothold.

Thorne had made his Premier League debut in the first game of 2012 and struggled to punch his weight at White Hart Lane.

His influential display against the Red Devils hinted that he had matured significantly in the past 12 months, giving fans one more reason to be optimistic for 2013.

That optimism was on show in the opening 10 minutes at Old Trafford as they started brightly and might have had a penalty when Shane Long went down under Chris Smalling's clumsy challenge.

But the positive start was undone when Graham Dorrans and Billy Jones failed to intercept a clever flick by Shinji Kagawa and Ashley Young's cross from the left was turned into his own net at the near post by McAuley.

United used their stroke of luck as a springboard but were denied by their former keeper, Ben Foster, brilliantly when he pushed a fierce shot from Ashley Young on to the crossbar. Tamas blocked crucially on the line from Michael Carrick and Foster's mis-hit clearance ricocheted just wide off Danny Welbeck.

But, after the interval, it was the Baggies who were the more likely scorers by the time Chris Brunt's corner hit McAuley's shoulder and thudded off the bar midway through the second half, although the Northern Irishman was penalised for a shove. The Baggies then laid siege to the United goal in a late assault, but in the final minute Van Persie struck United's second, cutting in from the right and bending a wicked left-footed shot into the top corner past a helpless Foster.

The Dutchman's emphatic strike extinguished any hopes Albion had of some reward but it could not deter the noisy Baggies fans, whose 'Pride of the Midlands' chants continued without interruption.

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Sports Desk 01902 319461 e-mail: chronsport@expressandstar.co.uk

Welborn is all set for that title shot

ROWLEY REGIS boxer Jason Welborn is looking to make the big breakthrough in 2013, ***writes Craig Birch.***

A rise from obscurity to be Midlands champion has landed Welborn a shot at British champion Frankie Gavin next month.

The hard-hitting welterweight, aged 26, overpowered the likes of James Flinn and Scott Haywood to get himself noticed.

Also at Walsall Town Hall on January 18 will be Martin Gethin in a dream scenario for the lightweight – a chance at the British and Commonwealth belts in his home town against Londoner Ben Murphy.

Welborn and Gethin will be the first Black Country fighters since Wolverhampton's Dean Harrison in March 2009 to box for a British title.

That may have been different as new British champion Brian Rose agreed a voluntary defence against Coseley's Jamie Ball, in March, but issues with Sky Sports and the British Boxing Board of Control saw an eliminator with Birmingham's Nasser Al Harbi end in a technical draw. By October, Ball had retired.

Cradley's Chris Male got a shot at the English featherweight title. A home fight at Dudley's The Venue against Josh Warrington ended in a points defeat.

Running in the family

THE Powell family were to the fore in West Bromwich Harriers' annual Boxing Day Handicap at Dartmouth Park.

Council alterations saw the course changed from 3.3-miles to a 3.66.

Winner on handicap was Archie Powell in 26min 54sec, with son Richard second in 25.24 and daughter Jenny clocking 31.45.

The fastest run came from Girmal Dehl in 22.41. Other finishers were Ruth Blackwood third, John Buckby fifth, Jim Greenwood sixth, Dominic Ashton eighth, Dave Jones ninth and Chris Thompson 10th.

Over Christmas, seven Harriers entered the Telford 10k-plus with James Jefferson and Steve Pitt in the elite group of runners. Olympian Andy Baddeley was the winner. Jefferson was 107th of more than 700 with Pitt 147th.

Fulham exploit Baggies' poor start to 2013

Albion 1 Fulham 2

ALBION made a surprisingly poor start to 2013 with this home defeat to struggling Fulham.

For reasons lost to the mysteries of team sport, the Baggies were everything they had not been during the previous calendar year which saw this team assemble 58 points from 40 Premier League games, ***writes Martin Swain.***

Lethargic, riddled with error and undermined by self-doubt, they allowed a Fulham team with one win in 12 games to dominate them far too easily in the opening half.

Briefly, they roused themselves to rattle Fulham after the break. But they were always running uphill. This is an Albion side which has the potential to win a KO competition and the best of them all approaches with Saturday's FA Cup opener at QPR.

However, you can bet even a third-round tie against opponents seemingly bound for relegation will be squandered if Albion turn up in the strangely listless mood.

Despite the best efforts of the New Year's Eve revellers in Birmingham, who had kept Martin Jol's players awake with the midnight fireworks over the Hyatt hotel, Albion spent the opening half searching for something to light their own touchpaper. It never emerged and Fulham, pushing and prodding the ball around Dimitar Berbatov's mesmeric touch, eased their way into the game. For more than half an hour, it failed to produce a telling finish but in the 40th minute, they swept out of defence to release Ashkan Dejagah, who stepped inside Liam Ridgewell and set up Berbatov to finish past Ben Foster. In the second half not only did Albion strike an immediate equaliser through Romelu Lukaku after some splendid work by Billy Jones, but arguably could have sewn up the match in the 10 minutes which followed. Lukaku might have done better than strike the outside of a post before Fulham survived a remarkable triple-decker. Once again Lukaku went charging clear, only for keeper David Stockdale's knee to block his shot; the rebound flew to Zoltan Gera who drove a follow-up effort on to the post and when that cannoned into his path, Chris Brunt saw Aaron Hughes stretch to head away his drive.

Fulham were then rewarded for their stubborn resistance with a goal which had Albion's afternoon written all over it – Jones and Gareth McAuley caught by Alexander Kacaniklic arriving between them before he spun away to beat Foster.

CLARKE SETS SIGHTS ON CUP ADVENTURE

ALBION boss Steve Clarke has declared an FA Cup adventure as a major new year target after his side began 2013 with Premier League defeat to Fulham.

The Scot set his sights on an extended FA Cup run as he urged his players to repay their fans for Tuesday's giveaway against the Cottagers.

Clarke pledged to field a strong side in Saturday's third-round Cup tie at QPR – and called on Albion to make up for the defeat by claiming a shock win later in the campaign.

by Steve Madeley

"I said when I came here I would try to do well in the cup competitions and I see no reason to change that," said Clarke.

"I might have to rest one or two players just because that's the stage of the season we're at but, fingers crossed, we'll get one or two of the injured players back.

"I'm not 100 per cent sure that will happen but it would be good if they did just to lessen the workload on some of the boys who are playing all the time."

Consolidate

The Baggies remain seventh in the Premier League despite beginning the new year with that 2-1 home defeat to Fulham.

And Clarke is setting his sights high for 2013.

"To try and have a good cup run and consolidate and build on the first half of the season," he said. "We've put ourselves in a good position."

Clarke confirmed Youssouf Mulumbu will be available at Loftus Road before flying to South Africa to link up with DR Congo for the Africa Cup of Nations.

That could keep him out of Albion's side for up to a month. Meanwhile, the Hawthorns head coach revealed that Scotland international Graham Dorrans was fit for Tuesday's game. Dorrans failed even to make the bench against the Cottagers despite starting the 2-0 defeat at Manchester United on Saturday.

Meanwhile, defender Billy Jones urged Albion to stay positive as he admitted his error helped Fulham snatch victory at The Hawthorns.

The Baggies full-back took responsibility for Alexander Kacaniklic's winning strike in the 2-1 defeat, but insisted the Baggies should still be optimistic about their new year prospects.

"We have to remain positive because the position we're in is a good one," said Jones. "We just want to kick on from where we are.

"We want to get to 40 points and then see how far we can go."

The Baggies fought back from a poor first-half display and a 1-0 half-time deficit to equalise against Fulham and looked favourites for a winner when Kacaniklic struck. Jones said: "We had them by the throat and I thought we were going to go ahead.

"But I've made a mistake. I presumed he (Kacaniklic) would mis-time his run and be offside, and he wasn't."

Albion striker Romelu Lukaku, right, celebrates his fine goal against Fulham with team-mate Gabriel Tamas

Drivers rev up for big night

RALLY drivers are preparing for their big awards night – and looking forward to this year's events.

The Heart of England rally championship awards night takes place at Hagley Golf Club, Stourbridge tomorrow. Plans are now being made for the official launch of the 2013 championship, on January 26 at the Curborough sprint circuit near Lichfield.

The calendar for 2013 has been finalised with organisers looking for an affordable but exciting on-road championship to include a round at Weston Park. There will be eight events with five scores to count.

Schedule: March 17, AGBO Stages, Weston Park; April 13, Horiba D'Isis Stages, MIRA Nuneaton; May 25, Red Dragon IT Stages, Down Ampney; June 21-22, Lovell Rally of the Midlands, Hinckley; August 17, Centenary Stages, Barkston Heath; September 29, Patriot Stages, Caerwent; October 26, Fat Albert Stages, Keevil; November 24, Carfax Stages, RAF Benson.

Cards galore in a heated battle

Halesowen 1 Chasetown 1

HONOURS were equal in a keenly-contested Evo-Stik Division One South encounter which saw seven yellow cards.

Tesfa Robinson struck a late equaliser for Chasetown after Ben Haseley's 24th goal of the season had handed Halesowen a first-half lead.

The Yeltz grabbed a 25th-minute lead when goalkeeper Dean Coleman's long clearance turned defence into attack and found Haseley to squirt a low shot under Ryan Price, despite the attention of three defenders.

Chasetown's late pressure finally forced an 87th-minute equaliser.

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